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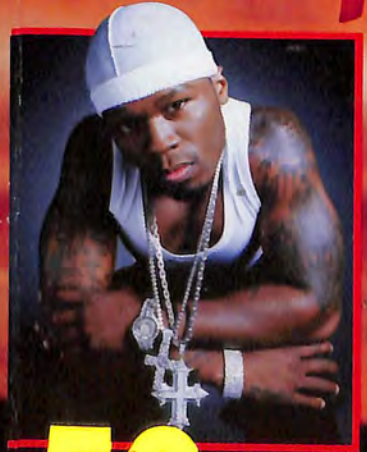
THE ULTIMATE MUSIC MAGAZINE

WOMAN OF THE YEAR!

CHRISTINA AGUILERA

BLASTS BRITNEY, BEYONCÉ AND *YOUR* BOURGEOIS VALUES >>>>>

THE 50 GREATEST ALBUMS OF 2003



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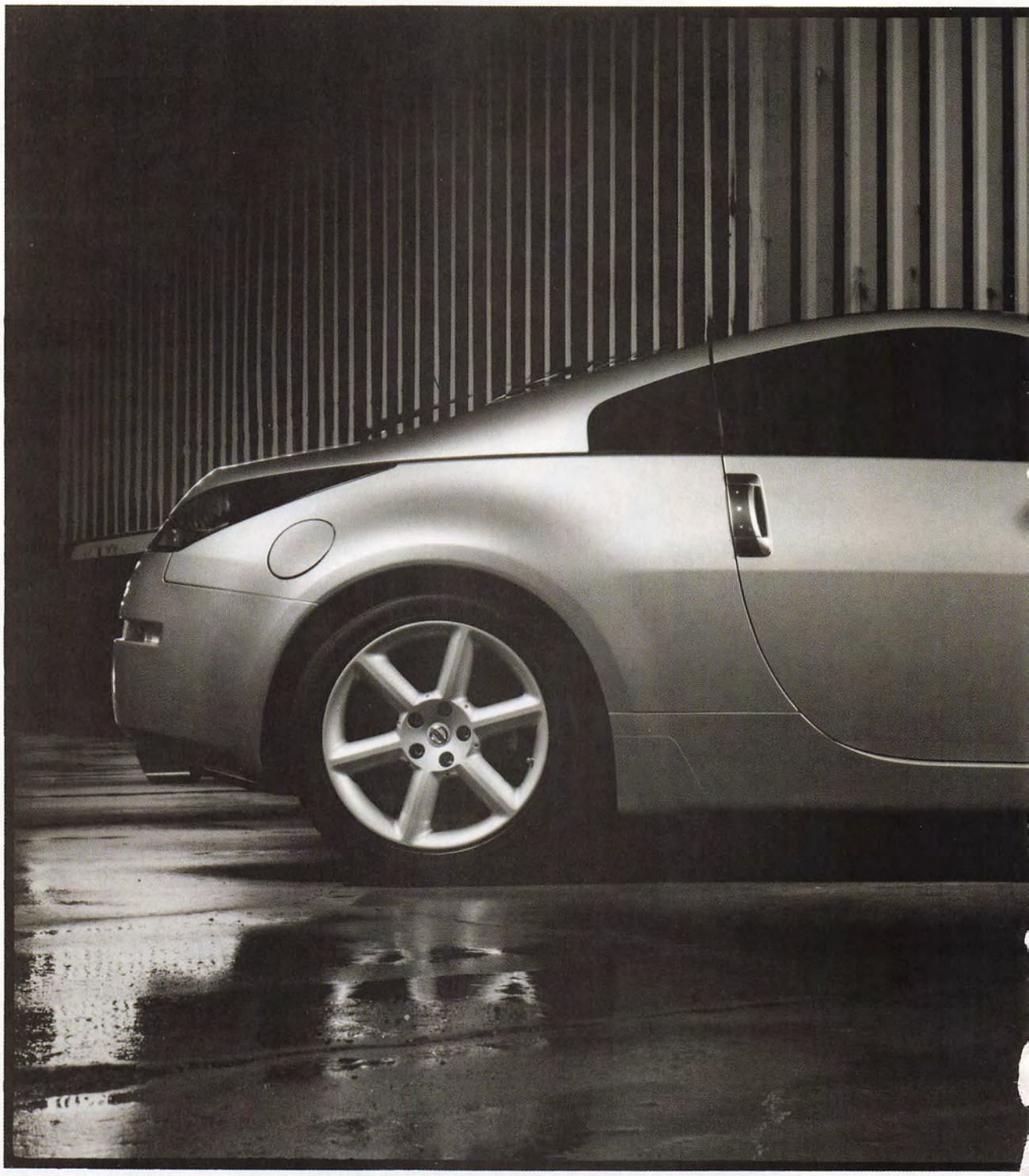

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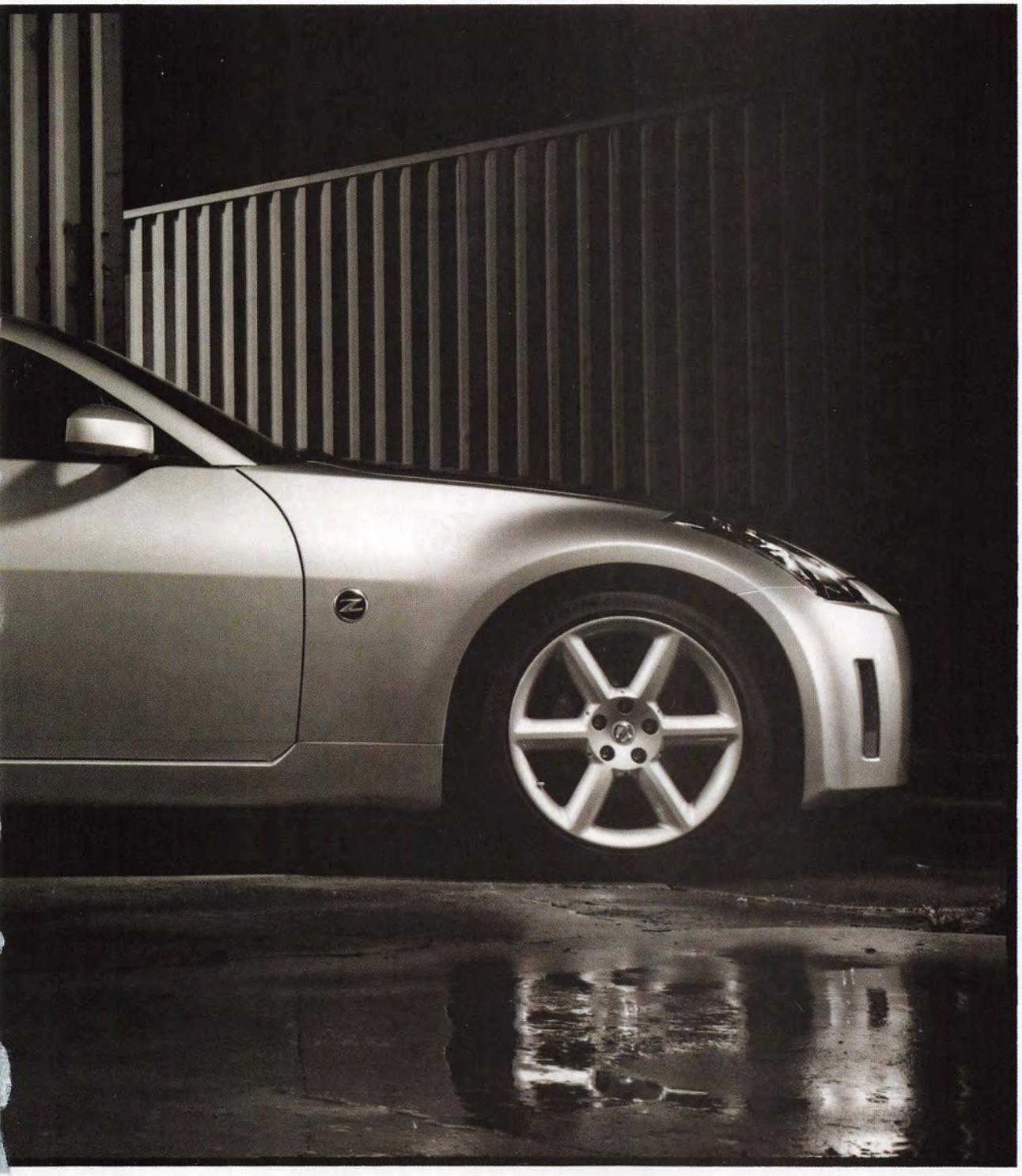

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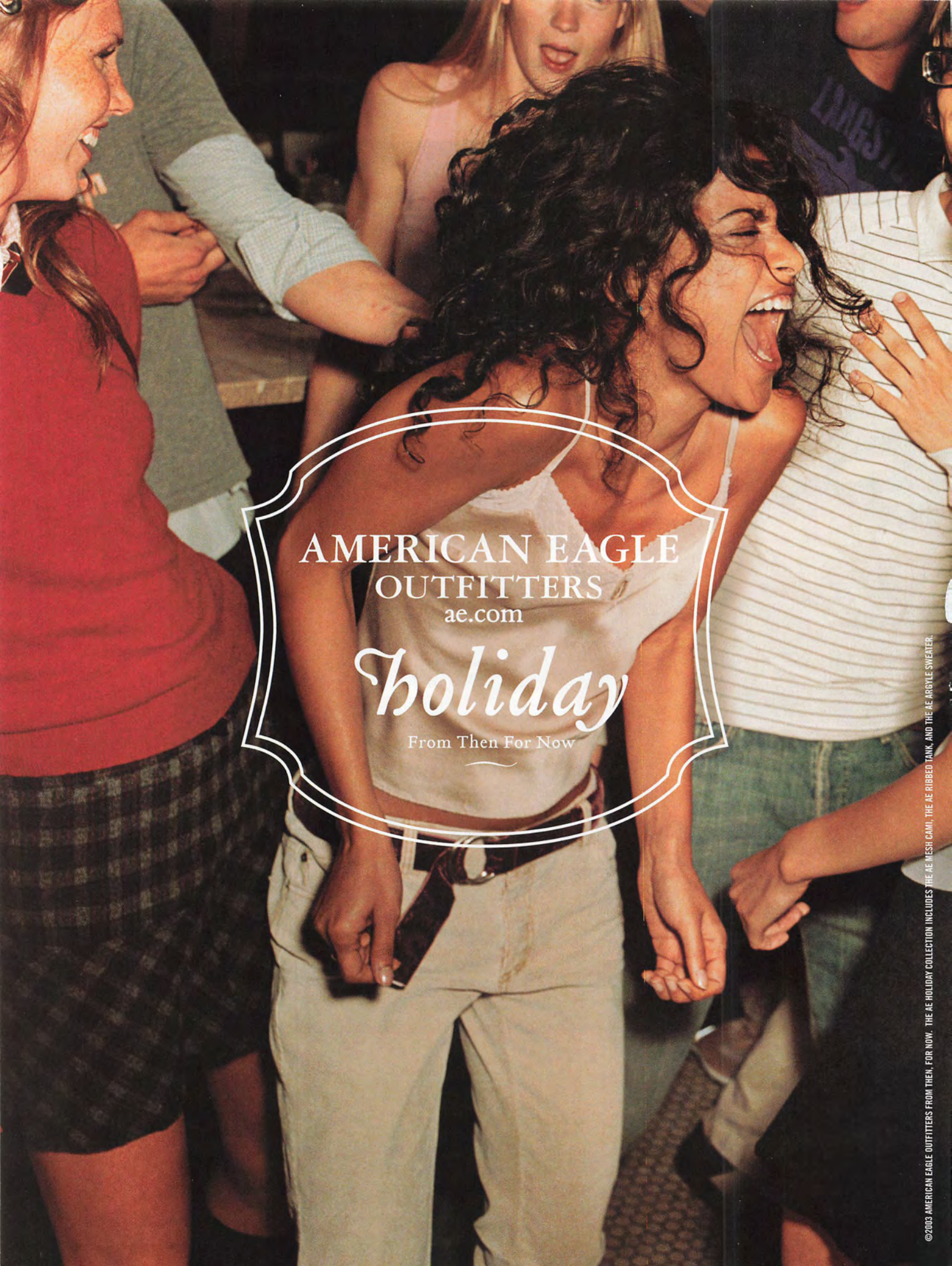

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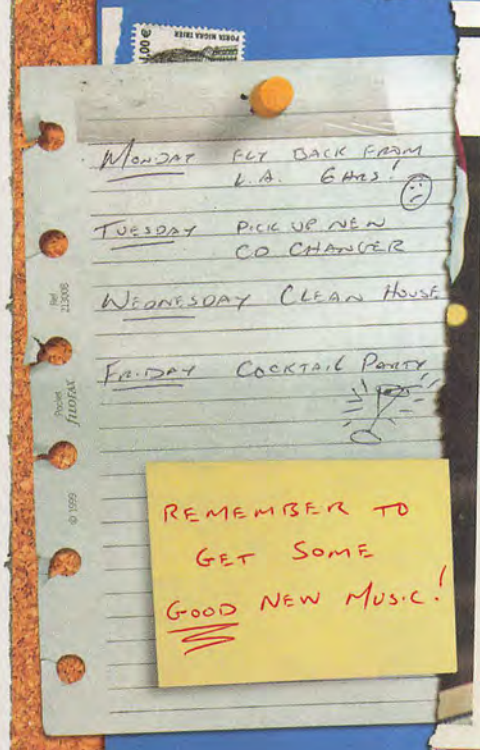

Cassandra Wilson

GLAMOURED

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The Grammy-winning vocalist returns to her distinctive intersection of jazz, blues, soul and folk. The album features a slew of powerful originals plus a collection of her trademark interpretations of diverse tunes from the likes of Abbey Lincoln, Muddy Waters, Willie Nelson and Bob Dylan.

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Norah Jones

COME AWAY WITH ME

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Dianne Reeves

A LITTLE MOONLIGHT

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BLENDER

FEATURES >>

72 RYAN ADAMS
He's given up alt-country and taken up with Parker Posey. The good news is, Ryan Adams still likes to drink — a lot.

80 $848: THE DARKNESS
Blender gave the British falsetto-metallers $848 to spend on anything they liked, and they chose . . . an ass. Then they paraded it around New York's Fashion Week festival. As singer Justin Hawkins pointed out, "donkeys really *are* the new black."

82 THE YEAR IN PHOTOS
Only one magazine snapped Mariah as Elvis, Dave Matthews as a Wookiee and the Flaming Lips redecorating strippers with Pepto-Bismol. And it wasn't *Fangoria*.

90 ARTIST OF THE YEAR: 50 CENT
In the last 12 months, he has sold 6 million albums, squired a movie-star girlfriend and signed a book deal. But he's also been arrested, sued and had a price put on his head. What, 50 Cent worry? "Nah," the rapper says. "That's for regular people."

96 THE 50 GREATEST ALBUMS OF 2003
Beyoncé? Check. Dashboard Confessional? Yup. Outkast? Naturally. But we bet you can't guess *all* the records on *Blender*'s highly discriminating roster of the year's best music.

114 WOMAN OF THE YEAR: CHRISTINA AGUILERA
She likens herself to Van Gogh, blasts Britney and Beyoncé and doesn't care what you think about her assless chaps. Our Woman of the Year takes off the gloves!

[That goth chick in art class has grown up. EVANESCENCE'S AMY LEE, p108]

ON THE COVER >>>>>

PHOTOGRAPHY **JUDSON BAKER**
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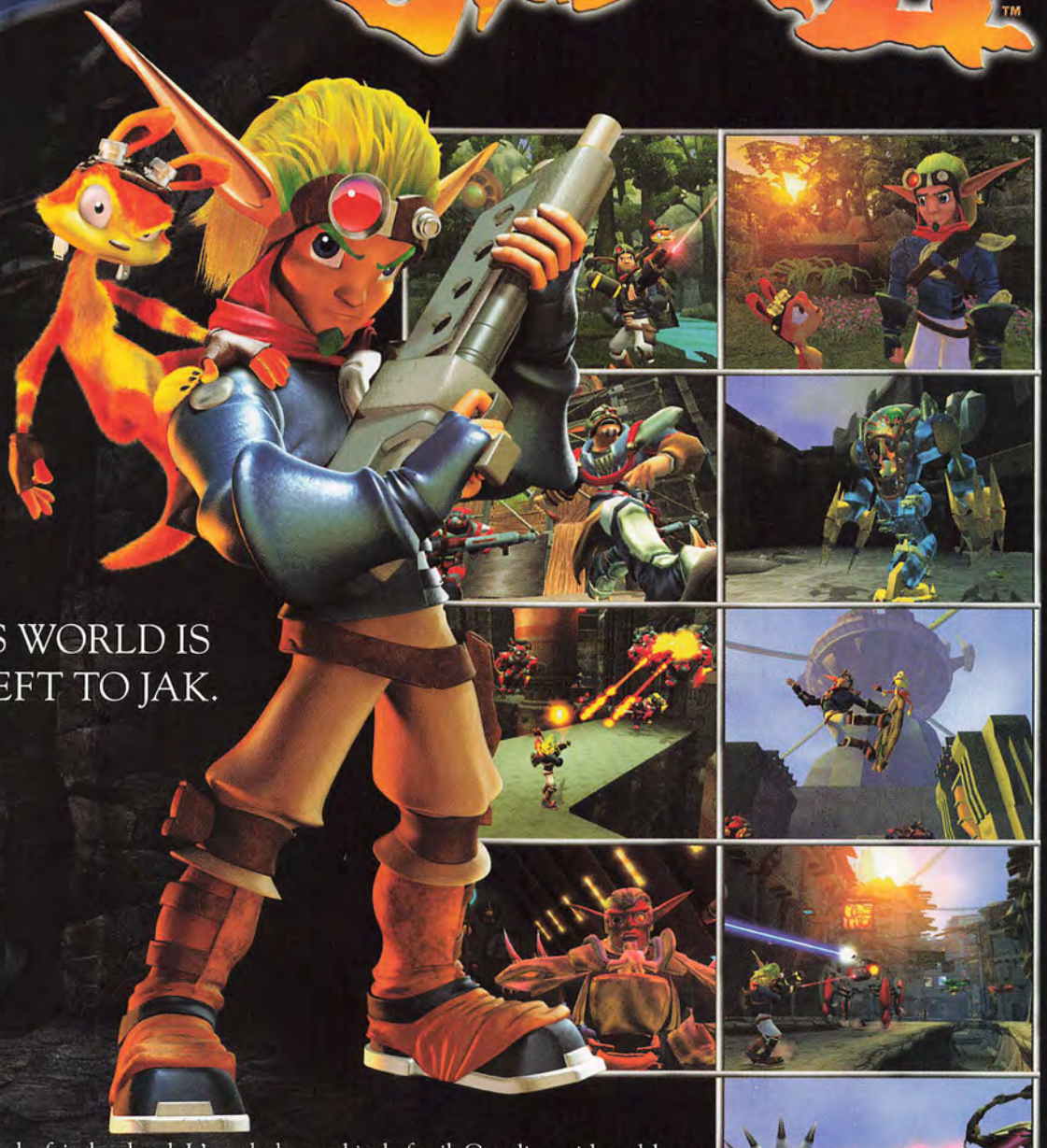

THIS WORLD IS
BETTER LEFT TO JAK.

It ain't no namby pamby fairyland, pal. It's a whole new kind of evil. Crawling with ruthless dictators, backstabbing allies and blood thirsty freaks with an appetite for extra rare meat. All pansies kindly tippy toe on out of here. This requires someone with serious ass-kicking savvy. And that someone, my friend, is Jak. This time he's pissed off and battle ready, with a frighteningly large gun, get-the-hell-outta-my-way hoverboard and a nasty case of mutant powers. So please, save yourself the detached appendages and let him handle it.

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"I like to break the rules!" JACK WHITE, p112

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26 **EDITOR'S LETTER**

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Courtney Love goes berserk; Pink breaks up with her boyfriend, makes out with starlet; the Dixie Chicks quit country; and so much more!

40 **THE NEXT BIG THING!**
Fefe Dobson; the Stills

60 **DEAR SUPERSTAR**
So, John Mayer, what did you learn from taking a dump in a public bathroom? And what did Jennifer Love Hewitt and Heidi Klum see in you? "I've got a giant, fat head." Oh.

66 **THE GREATEST SONGS EVER!**
It took Steven Tyler six years to write, but Joe Perry still hated it. Still, "Dream On" became *the* power ballad and saved Aerosmith's career.

70 **ASK BLENDER**
Who's the weird guy on Incubus's album covers? Did Trent Reznor and Tori Amos ever do the horizontal mambo? These burning questions and more cheerfully answered.

180 **WHO DOES JONATHAN DAVIS THINK HE IS?**
Korn's lead singer loves Duran Duran and gets perfect feedback on eBay. But lest you mistake him for an old softie, hear this: "Cats are fucking stuck-up pieces of shit!"

Dean Chalkley/NME (The White Stripes); Chris Buck (Mayer); Evan Agostini/Liaison Agency/Newsmakers/Newscom (Love); Kenneth Cappello (Adams); Chris Buck (Matthews); Simon Songhurst/Camera Press/Retna Ltd. (Hawkins)

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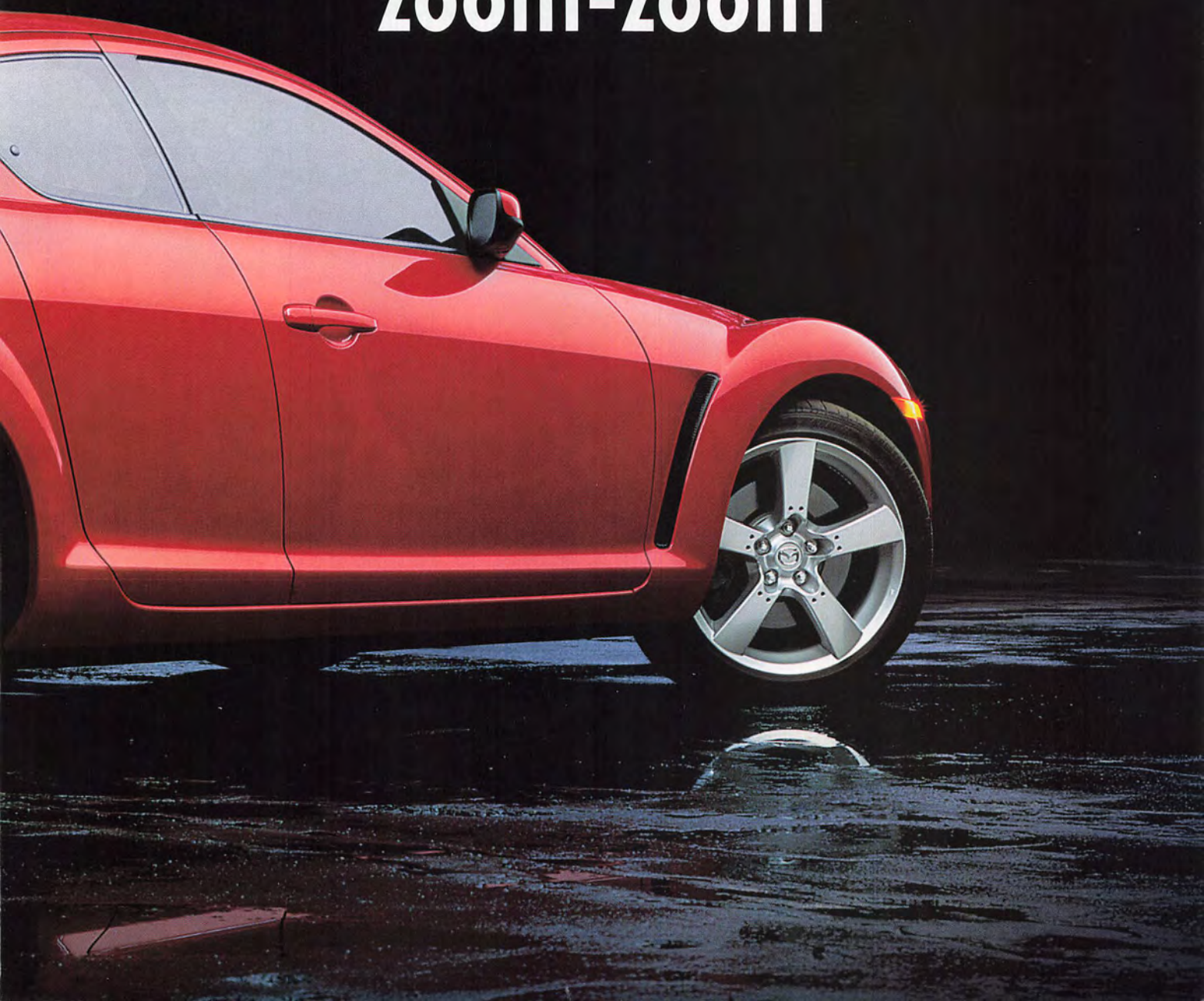

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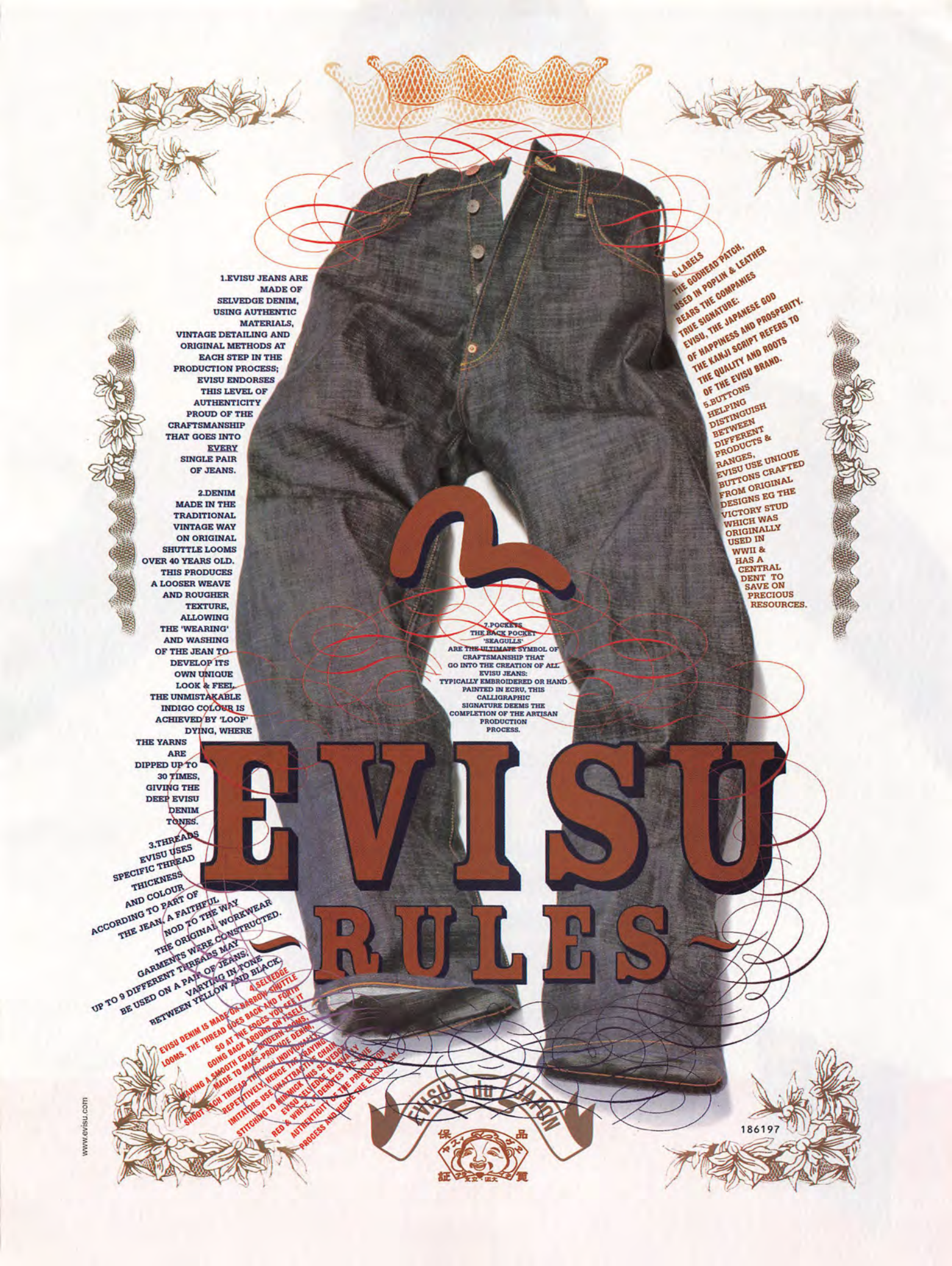
[She brought **Hollywood Golden Age values to pop.** MADONNA, p164]

Herb Ritts/Visages (Madonna); Danny Clinch (The Strokes); Justin Stephens (Evans); Ethan A. Russell/Camera Press/Retna Ltd. (McCartney)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4.SELVEDGE EVISU DENIM IS MADE ON NARROW SHUTTLE LOOMS. THE THREAD GOES BACK AND FORTH SO AT THE EDGES YOU SEE IT GOING BACK AROUND ON ITSELF, MAKING A SMOOTH EDGE. MODERN LOOMS, MADE TO MASS-PRODUCE DENIM, SHOOT SUCH THREAD THROUGH INDIVIDUALLY, REPETITIVELY, HENCE THE FRAYING IMITATORS USE. UNATTRACTIVE CHAIN STITCHING TO MIMICK THIS SELVEDGE. EVISU SELVEDGE IS ROYALLY RED & WHITE. IT DENOTES THE HIGH AUTHENTICITY OF THE PRODUCTION PROCESS AND HENCE THE EVISU JEAN.
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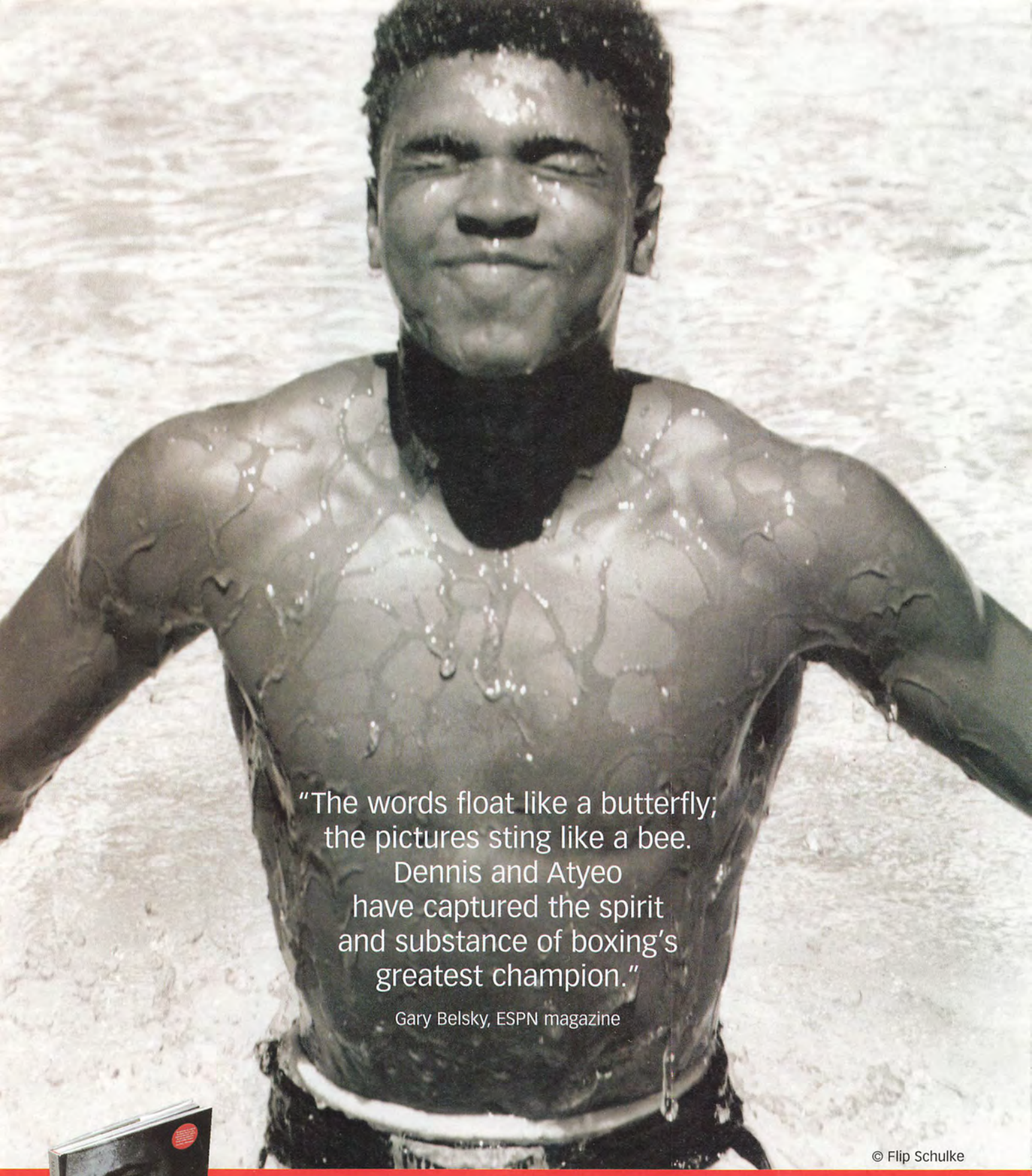

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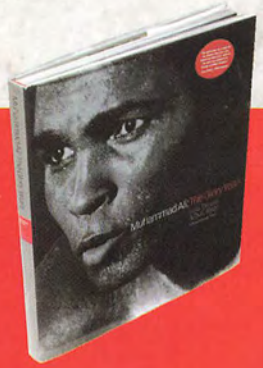

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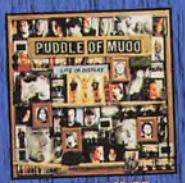

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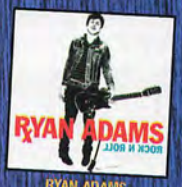

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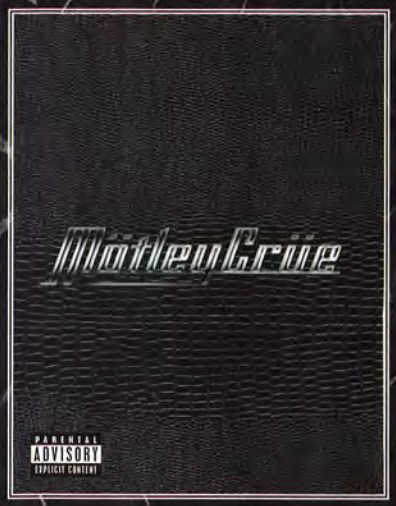

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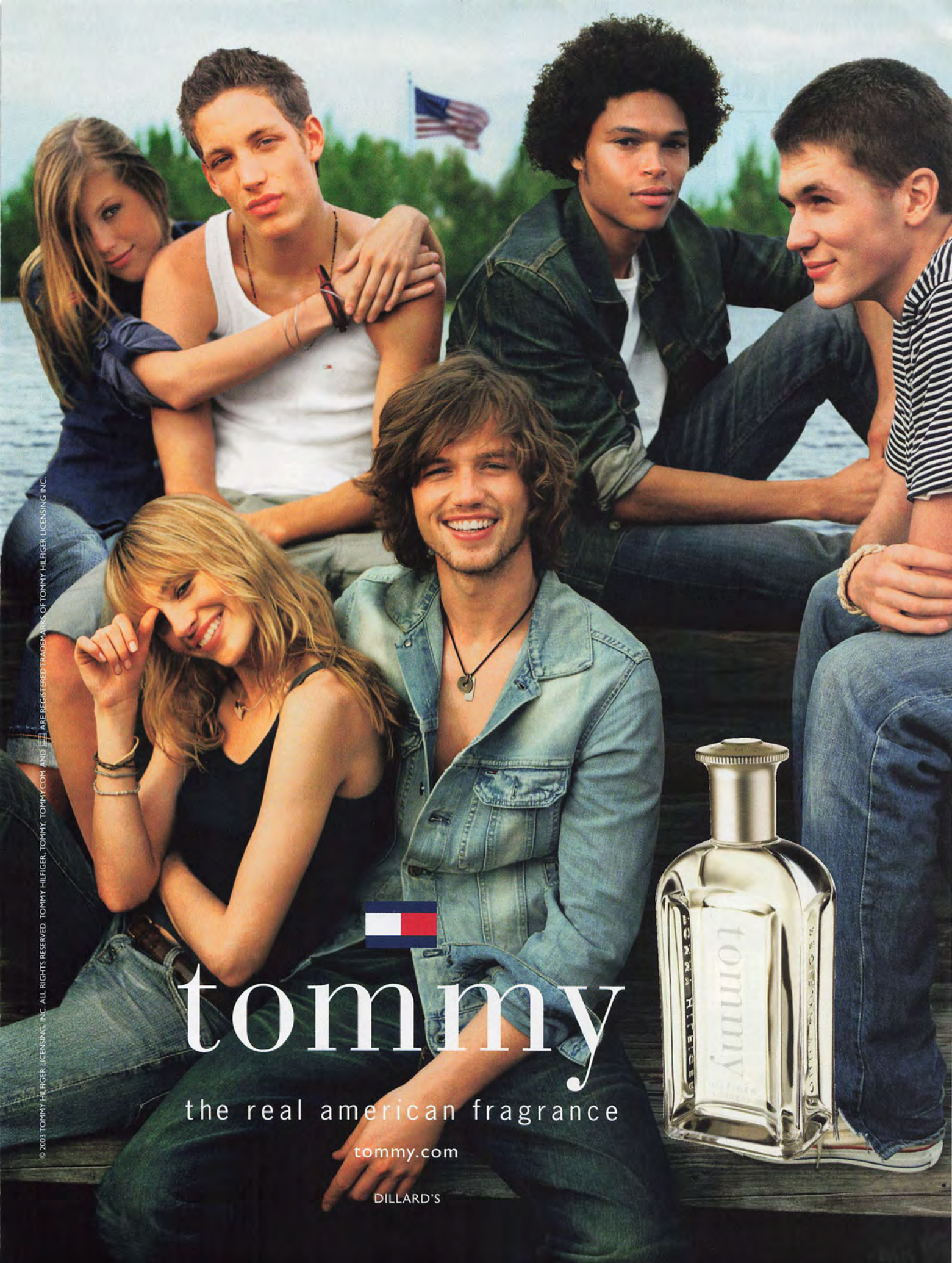
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WHAT A YEAR!

WHAT A YEAR it's been for *Blender*. If it's been worth doing, we've done it, seen it, sniffed it, drunk it, threw up on it, taken it home and tried to get our hands on its unmentionables.

We've partied with Missy Elliott, poured Pepto-Bismol over strippers with the Flaming Lips, had a laugh with Radiohead's Thom Yorke, stripped down to our swimsuit with Beyoncé, got dressed up with the White Stripes and impersonated Elvis with Mariah Carey. Oh, and let me state for the record that the incident with t.A.T.u. was blown all out of proportion — I mean, apart from anything else, there's no way a giraffe could have fit in that hotel room!

Now, I know what you're thinking: "All this is well and good, but what was your personal VIP-style highlight of the year, Andy?" Glad you asked. My highlight, unquestionably, was meeting this month's cover star, Christina Aguilera.

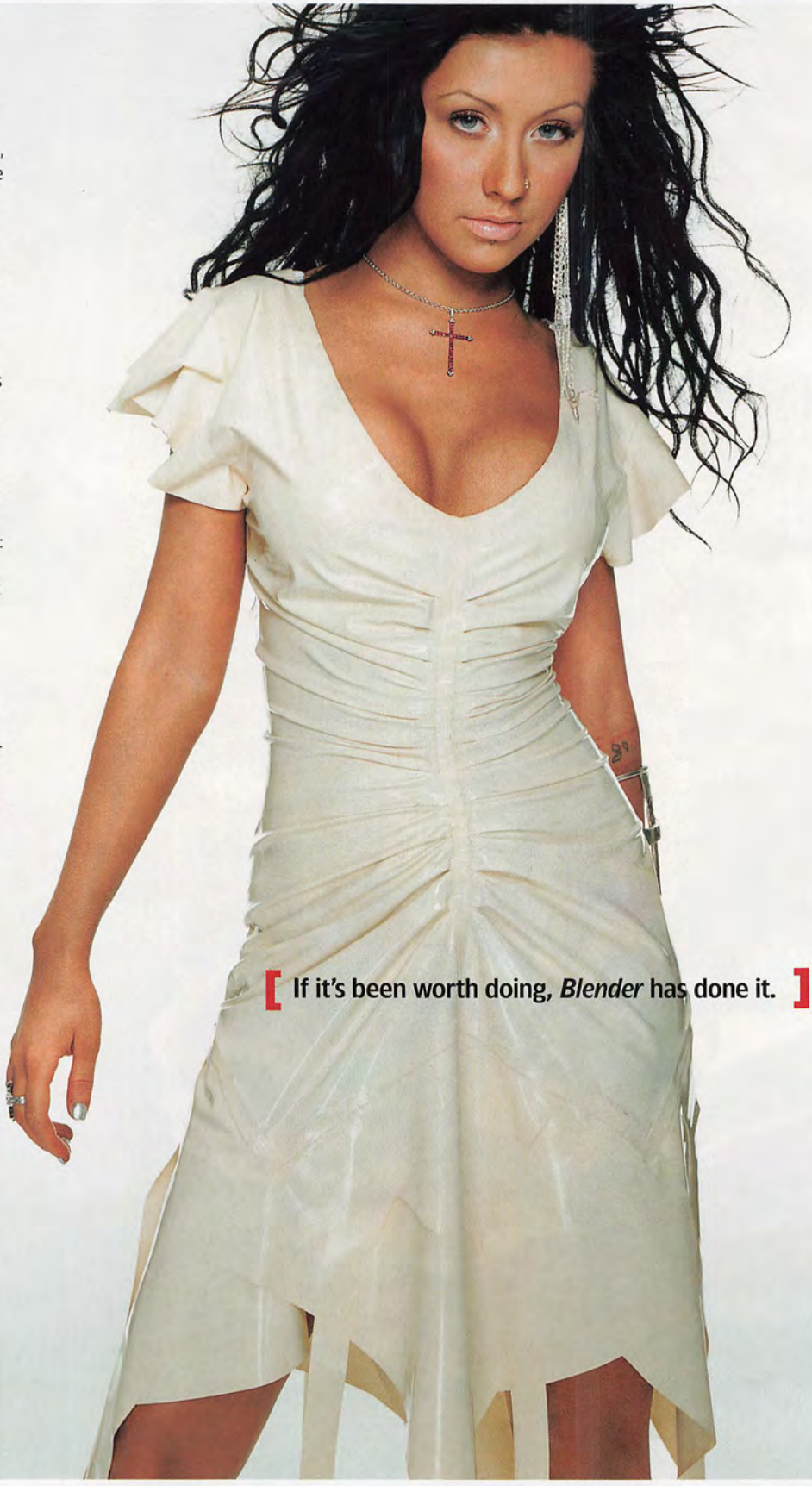
I'll never forget the first words that tumbled from her mouth as she gazed upon everyone's favorite editor in chief at the cover shoot.

"Excuse me," sighed the velvety-voiced superstar, "is this the way to the bathroom?"

Ah . . . memories.

Enjoy the issue!

ANDY PEMBERTON
EDITOR IN CHIEF



[If it's been worth doing, *Blender* has done it.]

"Screw the restraining order. . . ."

Judson Baker (Aguilera); TNT Productions (Pemberton)

Tennessee mistletoe.

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You've Got Mail!

WE WANT YOU TO SHARE . . .

TRULY POIGNANT

You offered a truly poignant tribute to Johnny Cash with the lyric on the spine of your November issue: "Everyone I know/Goes away in the end." This line, from Cash's recent cover of Nine Inch Nails' "Hurt," first crossed my mind when Cash's wife, June Carter Cash, recently died. At least Johnny's not alone now.

MIKE MARTINEZ, FINDLAY, OHIO

THE DOG'S BOLLOCKS

That was quite a perfect confluence of the photo of Triumph the Insult Comic Dog and a lyric from Snoop Dogg's "Doggy Dogg World" ("It's a crazy, mixed-up world/It's a Doggy Dogg world") on the last page of your November issue. Now if only Snoop Dogg would have Triumph as a guest on his next album. . . .

DEANNA MORALES, SAN ANTONIO

DO YOU PAY YOUR WRITERS?

In the last few months, your writers have hired strippers with the Flaming Lips, removed women's bras with Ludacris and now, in your November issue, gone bowling with Mandy Moore. Do they actually get paid? Or are they happy to do these things for free?

BEN CITRIN, TORRANCE, CALIFORNIA

Funny story: They *do* get paid, but only in Kenyan shillings — which, due to a quirk of international tax law, means they actually end up owing *us* money.

☆ Congratulations to the winner of *Blender*'s October Crossword contest, who walks away with a high-tech home theater system: Christina Shabaglian of Los Angeles. *Yes!*

MARIANNE FAITHFULL'S AIR

Was your 50 Hottest Rock & Roll Couples of All Time list [November] in reverse order or something? That's the only reason I can think that Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithfull came in lower than Kid Rock and Pamela Anderson, or Eddie Van Halen and Valerie Bertinelli. Faithfull is cooler than every other woman on your stupid list put together. What other woman on your list had a song even *half* as good as "Wild Horses" written about her (even if she did have to nearly overdose to inspire Jagger to write it)? Which of them has recorded an album anywhere near as good as *Broken English*? Courtney Love and the rest should be grateful just for breathing the same air Faithfull does.

ALLYSON MARKOVITZ, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Marianne Faithfull "enjoys" Mick Jagger's hilarious new joke.

LISTEN UP! >>

CALLING ALL *BLENDER* readers: We want to hear from you! Write us a letter. Tell us your deepest thoughts and secret desires. . . . Er, well, maybe just your thoughts, then. If we print your letter in our next issue, we'll send you the amazing SlimX 400. iRiver's premier MP3-CD player features playlist management, built-in FM tuner, skip-free music playback, up to 23 hours of play time and MP3, WMA and ASF format support. *Wow!*

Send your letters to Letters to the Editor, Blender, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, New York 10018. Or: your2cents@blender.com. Hell, yes!

Pink: Tut! Now that dress is ruined!

Judson Baker (Pink); Hulton Archive (Jagger and Faithfull)

PINK'S UNDERWEAR

Great Pink cover feature ["Shaking Things Up," November]. I've never had my opinion of someone so completely reversed. She really is very cool. One thing, though: Is there any chance of getting a look-see at those pictures she was showing your writer of her at the "underwear party"?

RICH LEVINSON, RANKIN, TEXAS

Sadly, no. Nice try, though.

BLENDER IS BEST

Music has been a big part of my life since the late '60s (I'm 44), and I've been buying magazines since the '70s. *Circus, Creem, Hit Parader, Spin* and *Rolling Stone* have always been my input to music and the stars who make it, but . . . *Blender* has outdone them all! Talk about a mag being crammed with music covering every possible format. I read every issue over and over, and I find something new all the time.

JEFF COLEMAN, PALM BAY, FLORIDA

CORPSE SNIFFER!

My, my — what a difficult decision I have to face after reading the →

BON JOVI

THIS LEFT FEELS RIGHT

GREATEST HITS...WITH A TWIST

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NOVEMBER 4TH, 2003

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Elephant Man likes to keep his hands on his nuts.

eloquent religious commentary of singer-songwriter Katy Rose ["Coming Attractions," October]. Rose confessed that one of her favorite places to spend time is an Atlanta cemetery where, she said, "when it gets really hot, you can smell the dead bodies." Should I stick with 2,000 years of revealed wisdom about man's relationship with God, or should I simply follow a 16-year old corpse sniffer who needs to leave therapy now and stop putting off getting a frontal lobotomy?

GREGORY SHERMAN, CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA

JUMBO TALENT

After reading new Jamaican ragga star Elephant Man's comment [The Next Big Thing!, November] that he got his name from his female fans ("They have their reasons," he said), I've compiled a list of my own possible "reasons":

1. He has a good memory.
2. He is afraid of mice.
3. He has large ears.
4. He has a small tail.
5. He performs in a circus.

Oh, sorry, there was one more:

6. He has a massive cock.

PAUL FELDSOTT, WICKENBURG, ARIZONA

Hmmm. . . . We're going to go with suggestion number 6.

Michael Stipe: C'mon, one bite. They're carrots — you like carrots!

I DANCE NAKED!

First, let me say what a pleasure it is to read *Blender*. I love the fact that it's obvious how much your writers love music. Second, in your October issue, the lyric on the bottom of page 22 ("Sitting here eating my heart out/ Waiting for some lover to call") is from Donna Summer's "Hot Stuff." I mean, I should know — I dance around naked to it all the time.

DIANA OSTROW, VIA E-MAIL

We know — your neighbors sent us some pictures.

MICHAEL STIPE'S BUTT

Regarding "33 Things You Should Know About R.E.M." [November]: As much as I like the band, I'd say that no matter how much they're paying their drummer, it ain't enough if he really does know Michael Stipe's "every butt twitch."

DAVIS GREENE, AURORA, COLORADO →

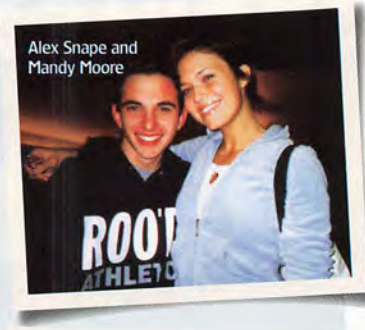
SUPERFAN!

Bringing out the stalker in you since 2001

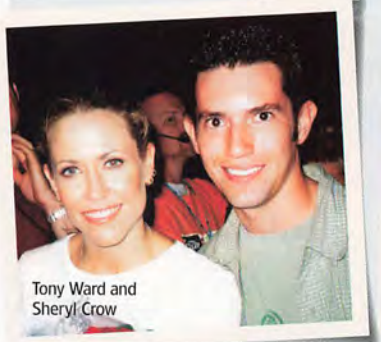
Roberto Muñoz and Dave Grohl

David Crowe and Robert Plant

Patrick Harris and Aretha Franklin



Alex Snape and Mandy Moore



Tony Ward and Sheryl Crow

Monica Batista and Gwen Stefani

>> THE HOLIDAYS ARE right around the corner, so give yourself a present: Go out and snag a photo op with your favorite pop star, and then send it to us. If we like it, we'll print it, and you'll get a Philips Digital Camera Key Ring. With the Key Ring's 1.3 megapixel output and 64 megs of storage, you can take hundreds of photos of your favorite stars in all their rock & roll glory! Please send your photographs (and please don't forget to include your name, address and telephone number where you can be reached) to Superfan!, *Blender*, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, New York, 10018. *Snap!*

Lego (Elephant Man), Patrick Hoelck (Stipe)

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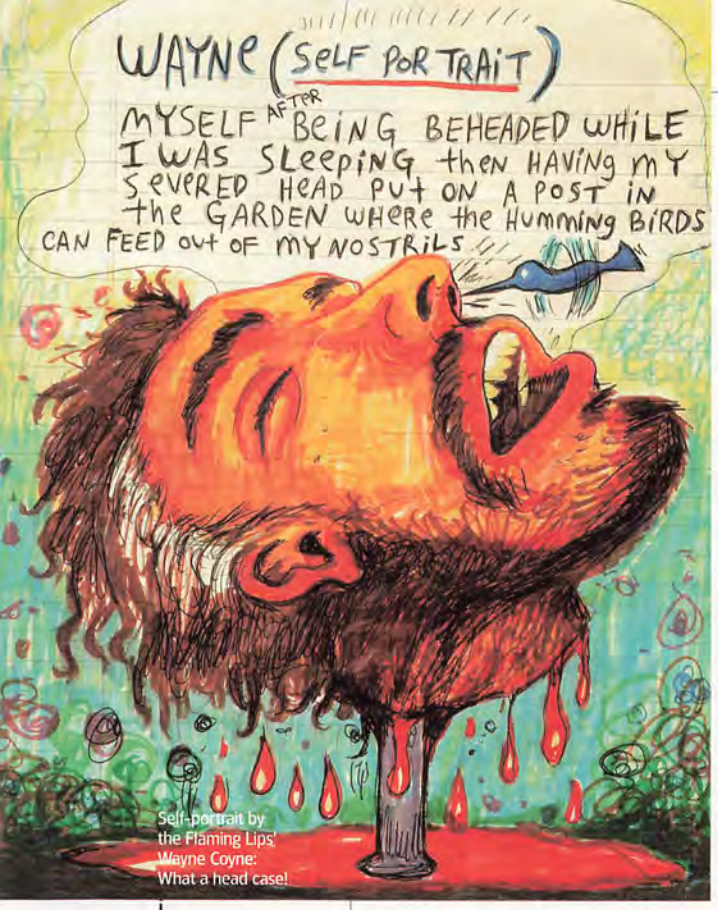


Self-portrait by the Flaming Lips' Wayne Coyne: What a head case!

"THEY" ARE READING THIS!

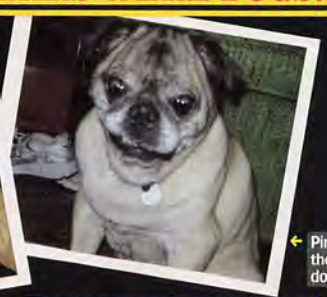
Looking through your gallery of rock-star self-portraits [November], I was intrigued that the Flaming Lips' Wayne Coyne said he's a "previous paranoid." Did he used to be paranoid and isn't anymore? Or is he paranoid about things that have already happened?

DAWN LANG, WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT

Wayne did intend to explain himself further, he said, but he was worried that "they" might find out.

IF POP STARS WERE DOGS...

↑ Billy Joel, the pop star



← Pinky, the dog

DOES YOUR DOG RESEMBLE A POP STAR?

If the answer is yes, send a photo with your name, address and who your dog is supposed to be to *Blender* at the address below. If we print yours, you'll win an iRiver iHP-120 MP3 player/FM tuner that holds 600 hours of music. *Yup, yup!*

Send your photos to: If Pop Stars Were Dogs, Blender, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, New York 10018. Or: your2cents@blender.com.

I AM TRULY AMAZED

I have never written to a music magazine before, but damn! As I perused your list of the 1,001 Greatest Songs to Download [October], looking for long lost gems, I could not believe my eyes. Hidden in the "cult" section was "This Town Ain't Big Enough for Both of Us," a long-lost song by the British band Sparks. I was a 12-year-old living in England when this track came out, and I was mesmerized by it. I was amazed to see it on your list. The 1,001 Downloads issue of *Blender* is a definite keeper.

TRACEY WILLIAMS, NOVI, MICHIGAN

GODAWFUL!

While looking through your 1,001 Downloads list, I stumbled upon a song I thought was dead: "When the Lights Go Out," by the band Five. Oh, my God. *Blender*, are you OK? Or was this another one of the editor in chief's "godawful" selections? I can't believe you know who Five were.

ELLA GRACE DOWNS, CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

We know everything.

I WANNA PUKE!

As someone who is trying to lose weight, I'd like to thank you for suggesting in your Pop Star Must-Haves: Gay Moments! piece [November] that limpbizkit's Mike Smith and Fred Durst are involved in some sort of same-sex tryst. With that disturbing image firmly lodged in my mind, I couldn't eat for two whole days!

ALEXANDRA MILNER, MABLETON, GEORGIA

We're pleased we could help, Alexandra. But for real weight-loss results, we recommend imagining Mr. Durst in a *self*-sex tryst.

YE OF LITTLE FAITH

Your recent review of Outkast's new CD, *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below* [New Releases, November], was so enthusiastic that I had to go buy it, even though the idea of a double album that's also two solo albums sounded like the worst idea in the world. Please remind me never to doubt you again.

JULIA LYNN, SANFORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Never doubt us again.

DON'T FIRE US!

I've been reading *Blender* only a short time, and I subscribed after flipping through only one issue. I saw that you guys were recently featured in the *New York Times*, in a piece about your review of *Mustique Blues Festival 2003*, a compilation on which *Blender*'s owner, Felix Dennis, appears. It's cool that you guys had the balls to give your boss three stars instead of four or five. That alone proves that your reviews are the best and most reliable. Again, keep doing the awesome job you do.

MATT PACKER, EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN

Well, actually, we all thought it was really a five-star album but were concerned that, should our owner realize he had reached perfection, he might stop performing — which would, of course, be a tragedy. (P.S.: Can we get the vending machine fixed now?)

Outkast: Their new album is very good.

BELIEF IS ALL!

One of the best parts of *Blender* is the News Roundup, which features sometimes unbelievable tales of pop stars' behavior. Friends of mine seem divided over the veracity of some of these stories, which you present as fact. Some people even think you fabricate them solely for entertainment. Is there a disclaimer for this section that I might previously have missed? Please tell us, once and for all: Are we to read these items as we would read *Newsweek* stories, or as *National Enquirer* stories? I want to believe!

DARREN AMADOR, VICTORIA, TEXAS

***Newsweek*? Don't make us laugh.**

GOOD NAME FOR A BAND! >>

TRON JAVOLTA

LUIS FREGOSO III AND DAN LILLIE, MODESTO, CALIFORNIA

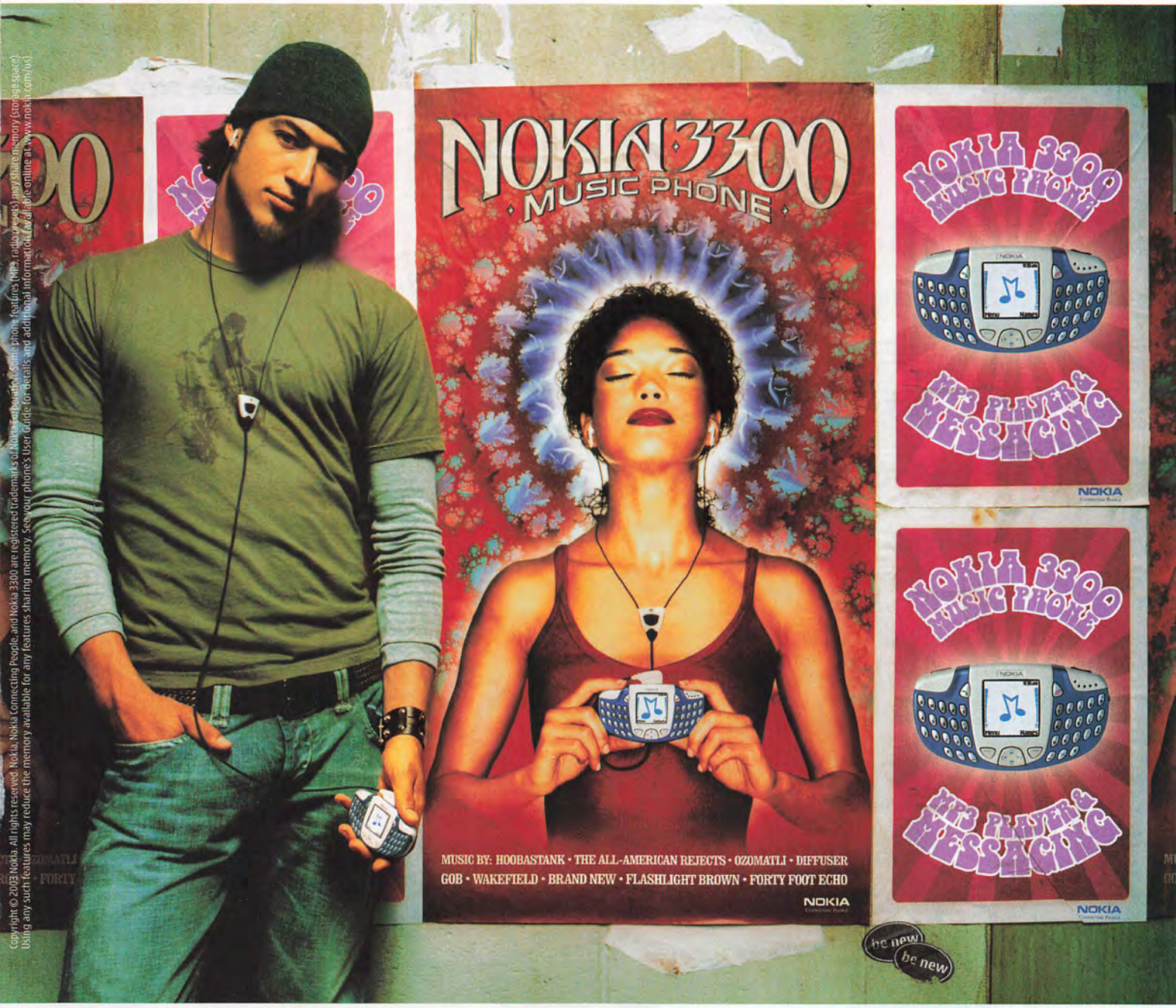
LOOK! NEW CONTEST!

Do you have a good name for a band? Send it to *Blender*! We'll pick the best one we get, and if it's yours, you'll win a sweet CD/MP3 player from iRiver that's just like the one pictured below — how cool is that? So don't hesitate!

Please send your entry to Band Names, Blender, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, New York 10018. Or e-mail to: bandnames@blender.com. Good luck!

Courtesy of Wayne Coyne (Coyne); Jim Spellman (Joel); Sarah Cullen (dog)

NOKIA
3300



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TO ALL OUR FRIENDS!

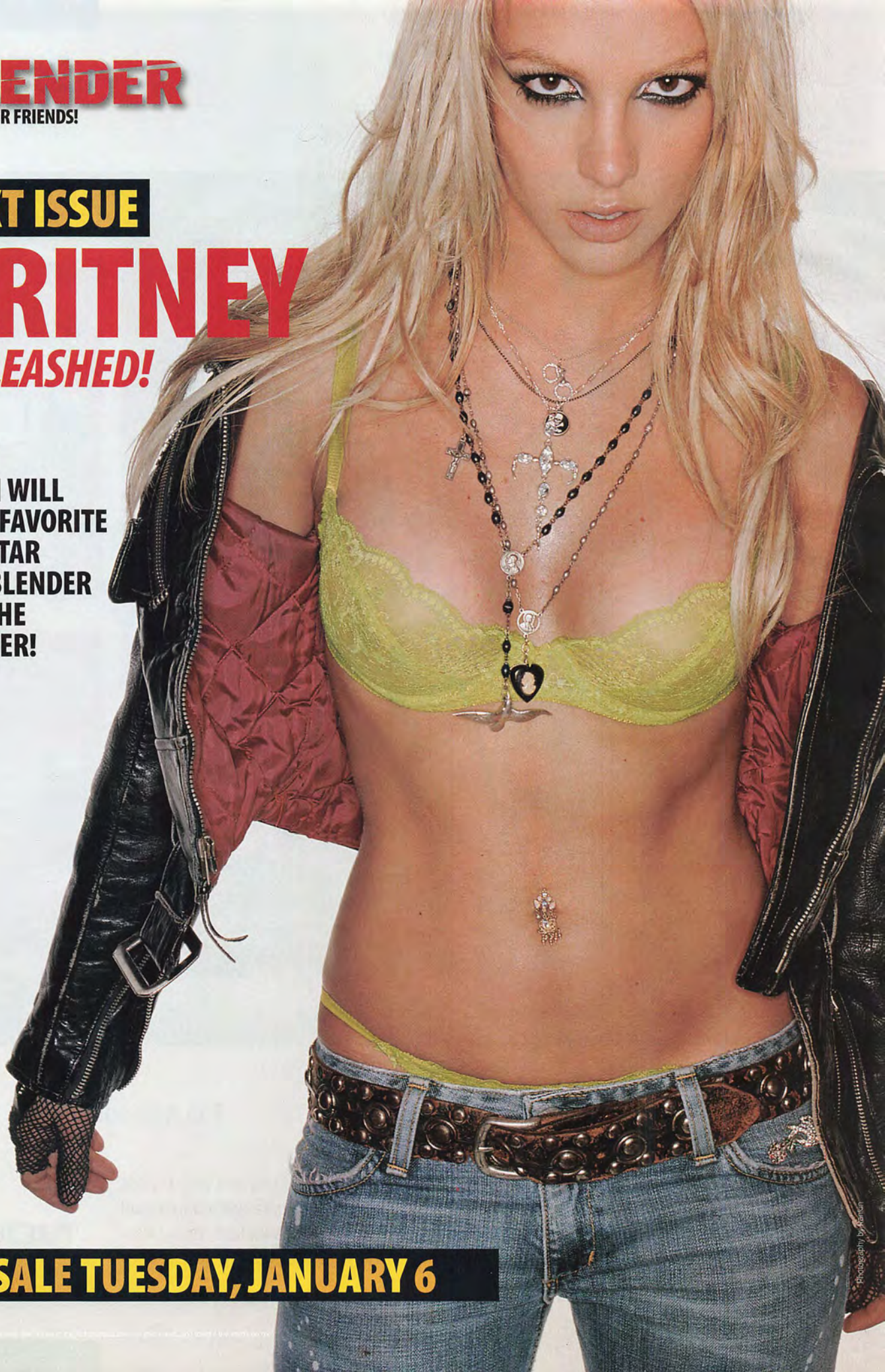
NEXT ISSUE

BRITNEY

UNLEASHED!

PLUS

WHEN WILL YOUR FAVORITE POP STAR DIE? BLENDER HAS THE ANSWER!



Photography by Ramon

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★ PINK'S SAPPHIC SMOOCH ★ LIBERTINES REUNITE ★ BRITNEY'S STALKER »

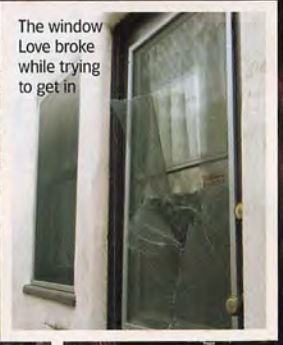
COURTNEY WATCH SPECIAL!

Meltdown!

» Courtney Love tries to break into her ex-boyfriend's home, gets arrested and overdoses on pills. Can she get her life sorted, release an album and get Frances Bean back?

Courtney Love in New York City, September 13

James Barber's house, which Love tried to enter on October 2



The window Love broke while trying to get in

COURTNEY BEHAVING BADLY »

It has been one hell of a year for Courtney Love . . .

SEPTEMBER 21, 2002
Flashes breasts and rubs groin while hosting MTV2's *24 Hours of Love.*

DECEMBER 10
TheSmokingGun.com reports that Winona Ryder's doctor, Jules Lusman ("Dr. Feelgood"), supplied a "Ms. C.L." with Demerol and Vicodin.

DECEMBER 23
Has her anus waxed, hops in a cab naked and streaks through the streets of London for a British magazine shoot.

DECEMBER 30
Allegedly throws herself on Joe Strummer's coffin at his London funeral. (Her manager dismisses the allegation as "crap.")

FEBRUARY 4
Is arrested upon landing at Heathrow Airport in London for disruptive, abusive behavior toward a flight attendant on a Virgin Atlantic flight from New York.

FEBRUARY 5
Strips to undies and fishnets after showing up onstage in a Donald Duck costume at Elton John's charity fundraiser at London's Old Vic Theatre.

FEBRUARY 7
Takes off her clothes to show her new underwear to friends and patrons at a pub in London — then falls to the floor.

FEBRUARY 20
Claims her behavior on the Virgin flight was caused by a flight attendant who wouldn't allow her "dis-enabler," who was hired to help her kick her Xanax and Vicodin habits, into first class.

APRIL 10
Boasts that her performances at the Reading and Leeds festivals in England in August will be "pornographic" during a call to BBC Radio 1.

JUNE 5
Pulls out of Reading and Leeds to finish her solo album, *America's Sweetheart,* which is due out in October.

CONCERN GROWS for Courtney Love after the troubled singer attempted to break into a house in Los Angeles and overdosed on drugs just hours later.

Los Angeles police said they arrested the 39-year-old Love just after 2 A.M. on October 2 when they found her outside the home of James Barber, her ex-boyfriend/manager/producer. Barber, who had called 911, refused to press charges, but the LAPD detained Love, as the arresting officers suspected she was intoxicated.

After being charged with violating Safety Code 11550 (Under the Influence of a Controlled Substance), she was released on $2,500 bail at approximately 5:30 A.M. Forty minutes later, emergency services received a call from her Beverly Hills home. Love, suffering from a drug overdose, was given immediate treatment by paramedics, who then rushed her to a Century City hospital at 6:55 A.M.

Love checked herself out of the hospital several hours later. Her daughter, 11-year-old Frances Bean, was asleep at home at the time of the overdose, Love said.

Though toxicology tests were pending at press time, reports indicate that she had ingested OxyContin, a morphine derivative commonly referred to as "hillbilly heroin." If convicted, Love faces up to a year in jail.

Her publicist, Heidi Schaeffer, says, "[Love] went to [Barber's] house to get some CDs. When no one answered, she banged on the door and inadvertently broke a window."

When she returned home, Schaeffer maintains, Love accidentally exceeded her prescription medication's dosage because she could not understand the label. "When she realized what she had done," Schaeffer says, "she became alarmed and then went to the hospital."

In a message Love later posted on her Web site, she said, "Five words [*sic*], don't fuck with a strong sedative . . . oh, and the controlled substance? One fucking word, Xanax!"

Love also claimed on her Web site that the house she was accused of breaking into was her own. "Two words," she wrote. "My house."

With daughter Frances Bean at the premiere of *Pearl Harbor*, May 21, 2001

With then-boyfriend James Barber at the premiere of *Man on the Moon*, December 7, 1999

LOVE LOSES CUSTODY

On October 21, a Los Angeles judge ordered Courtney Love to move out of her Beverly Hills home so her 11-year-old daughter, Frances Bean, can move in with a nanny. Love came to blows with Kurt Cobain's mother, Wendy O'Connor, at the hearing. As of press time, O'Connor has custody of Frances Bean.

"She's as addicted to the drama as she is to the drugs."

(Barber and his ex-wife Lesley have used the home as a registered residence, but Love hasn't.)

These incidents are the latest in a series of erratic outbursts in the last year (see timeline):

In February, Love was arrested for accosting a flight attendant on a trip from New York to London aboard Virgin Atlantic Airways. Love claimed that she verbally attacked the Virgin attendant because her "dis-enabler" — the minder who was hired to keep her off drugs — was not allowed to sit with her in first class during the flight. (He had not purchased a first-class ticket.)

She later said she had hired the man to help her kick both Xanax, which she described as "completely addictive," and Vicodin, which she called "the new LSD — Lead Singer's Drug."

More recently, during the August blackout, New York police were called to investigate a high-volume telephone shouting match between Love and her A&R manager. The singer was heard demanding that her record label find some way to get her out of New York.

Love is suffering from business difficulties as well. Not only has she twice postponed the release of *America's Sweetheart*, her first new CD in five years (which has songs titled "Pills" and "All the Drugs in the World"), she has burned through management companies, moving from the Worldwide Entertainment Group to Sanctuary.

A source close to Love offered insight into her troubles: "She's as addicted to the drama as she is to the drugs. That makes it hard to see the warning signs." *JENNIFER VINEYARD*

Opposite page, clockwise from far left: Paul Smith/Featureflash/Retna Ltd.; Matthew Peyton/Getty Images; Lee Madden/Splash News/Newscom; Nate Brunton/Zuma Press/Newscom; Dave Hogan/Getty Images; Alphonse Telymonde (still-life); Kevin Mazur/WireImage.com. This page, clockwise from top: Steve Grantz/WireImage.com; Evan Agostini/Getty/Newscom; Mr. Snuggles (still-life); Jordan Van Aken/Zuma Press/Newscom; Jeff Vespa/WireImage.com

JUNE 6
Issues a rare apology for disparaging remarks made about Salma Hayek, who was dating Edward Norton, Love's ex-boyfriend. The comments had been leaked to the press.

JULY
Shaves pubic hair and wanders around nude, except for blue glitter stuck to her body, sources at a photo shoot say.

AUGUST 14
Demands that her record label rescue her with a car during New York's blackout.

AUGUST 16
Accuses former manager Dave Lory, from Worldwide Entertainment Group, of spreading rumors that she's on crack.

AUGUST 22
The release of Love's solo album is pushed back to November 4.

AUGUST 27
Backs out of presenting at the MTV Video Music Awards, blaming an infection in her left foot. Rumors spread that she needs rehab.

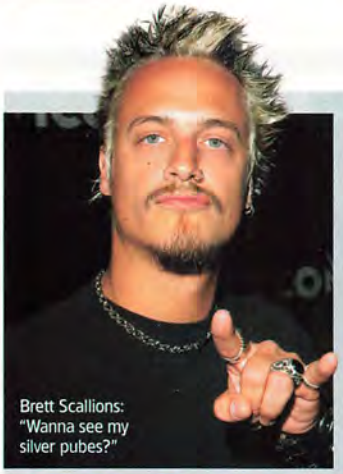
SEPTEMBER
Appears topless and bruised in un-retouched photos in the October issue of *i-D* magazine.

SEPTEMBER 24
America's Sweetheart release date is pushed back to February 10.

OCTOBER 2
Attempts to break into ex-boyfriend's house; arrested for being intoxicated; overdoses at her home.

OCTOBER 8
Charged with being under the influence of a controlled substance.

OCTOBER 21
Loses custody of her 11-year-old daughter, Frances Bean, after having a physical altercation with Kurt Cobain's mother at a hearing in Los Angeles. *JENNIFER VINEYARD*



Brett Scallions: "Wanna see my silver pubes?"

Do You Rock?

Brett Scallions

Does the Fuel frontman and goat-testicle swallower . . . rock?

Ever trashed a hotel room?
One time, I took a keg of beer and sprayed down the entire room. Then I tossed all the furniture into one corner. It was fun!

Largest number of people you've woken up next to in bed?
More than one, fewer than three!

Ever been declared legally dead?
I've felt dead from excessive drugs and alcohol, and my heart's probably stopped, but there wasn't any doctor around to declare me dead.

Largest amount of drugs consumed in one sitting?
Three eight-balls, 'shrooms and an ounce of weed on a three-day binge. My band hates me for it. But after a show, nothing's better than a rail!

Biggest celebrity you've passed out drunk with?
Kid Rock and I have had our fair share of party time.

Most expensive item of clothing?
Two leather suits, which each cost six grand. I'm not like Paul McCartney, all anti-leather. I'm from the South — I eat and wear cow!

Wildest rider demand?
Just a lot of alcohol, a box of rubbers and socks. We bring the porno!

Stupidest thing you ever ate?
Goat testicles! I ate 'em on a dare.

Coke in bathrooms a routine?
I've done it off the nastiest toilet seats in the stankiest slum clubs of New York City! *JONAH WEINER*

VERDICT:
THE TOILET-SEAT COKE-SNORTING SEALS IT: BRETT SCALLIONS *ROCKS!*

→ FUEL'S NEW ALBUM, *NATURAL SELECTION* (EPIC), IS OUT NOW.

News Roundup!

50 CENT was forced to reshoot the video for his single "P.I.M.P." because MTV was unhappy about the number of topless women in the original version. The new footage is estimated to have cost the rapper $400,000.

CHRISTINA AGUILERA has claimed that she gets "hornier looking at women than at men."

Former Stone Temple Pilots singer **SCOTT WEILAND** is starting his own record label, Softdrive Records, which will be a subsidiary of Interscope.

THE BEACH BOYS have blocked founding member Al Jardine from touring under the name the Beach Boys Family and Friends. He is now barred from performing live under any moniker including the words *beach* or *boys*.

WORD!

"It's really irritating."
BEYONCÉ, ON HOW SHE FEELS ABOUT PEOPLE SAYING THE WORD *BOOTYLICIOUS*

Chris Martin: "I know — let's call ourselves Moldplay!"

Row, row, row your boat. . . .

Hairy!

Coldplay's Chris Martin: coif exposé

>> *BLENDER* HAS unearthed a photo of a long-haired Chris Martin taken around 1998 when he was an ancient-history student at University College in London. His Coldplay bandmates Guy Berryman, William Champion and Jonny Buckland also attended the school.

Martin received his degree a month after Coldplay signed a major-label record contract.

More recently, Martin (sporting his familiar buzz cut) and his girlfriend, actress Gwyneth Paltrow, performed a duet at a friend's bachelorette party (inset).

Coldplay released a CD/DVD set, *Live 2003*, in October, featuring concert footage and a documentary shot in Australia. *NOEL BODDIE*

Pop Star Must-Have
TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS!

When pop stars give their drivers a day off, things get scary behind the wheel

Madonna

Scary Spice

Paul McCartney

Queen Latifah

Debbie VanStory/Zuma Press/Newscom (Scallions); Ayman Roston/News International Photos/Newscom (Martin); Splash News (Martin and Paltrow); Lopez and Affleck: Madonna: Scary Spice: McCartney: Latifah); Gary French (illustration)

RATCHET & CLANK GOING COMMANDO

They're back. And they're itching for action. With tons of planets to conquer in a whole new gigantic galaxy, you better believe Ratchet & Clank are gonna sink their teeth into some destruction. Ummm, destruction. With weapon upgrades, mods, armor and the ability for Ratchet to get stronger and smarter as the game goes on, this could get uglier than the Grandmas In Bikinis Calendar after-party. Speaking of parties, there's also hoverbike racing, space combat and gladiator arenas. As far as weapons and gadgets go, Ratchet & Clank are stacked with 50 new ones, along with unlockable upgrades, so by the end of the journey, you'll go through more weapons and gadgets than a hungry fat man will go through chicken wings at lunch. Lock and load, baby, lock and load.

YES, YES, YES, YES, YES, YES, YES, AND HELL YEAH.

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD. PLAY IN OURS.

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Mild Violence

PlayStation.2

INSOMNIAC GAMES

www.us.playstation.com

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The Next Big Thing!

FEFE DOBSON

Move over, Avril — there's a new angsty Canadian teenager in town!

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KENNETH CAPPELLO

>> "I'VE HAD A bunch of boyfriends," says Fefe Dobson with something resembling a coy smile. "Nothing too serious, but if they upset me, they tend to make it into one of my songs. I'm not trying to bite anybody's head off — I just want to have my say."

Dobson, 18, is the pop world's latest confessional singer-songwriter, and her feisty, self-titled debut — part Gwen Stefani, part Pat Benatar — reads like a succession of diary entries written in red ink, its main targets errant lovers and, on the stark "Unforgiven," the wayward father she hasn't seen in a decade.

"I write about my feelings," she says, "because I'm sure they're pretty universal. Also, they're much easier to deal with once I've gotten them out."

Born in Toronto, Dobson was raised on a jarring diet of her mother and older sister's musical tastes: downstairs, Lionel Richie and Michael Jackson reigned; upstairs, Nirvana and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Then there's Dobson's own secret love: Judy Garland. "I played Dorothy in a school production of *The Wizard of Oz*," she explains, "and I've been obsessed with her ever since."

For Dobson's eleventh birthday, her mother bought her a karaoke machine, which an enterprising Fefe used to make a demo tape. She sent it to record companies across the country. By the time she was 15, music execs were nipping at her heels.

"I always knew I had something," she says of her talent, "but I never knew people would be so receptive so soon." The response to her first single, "Take Me Away," has amazed her: "I seem to have fans already! But I'm trying to keep my head on straight."

What about her exotic first name? "It's what I've always been called, but no, it's not my real name."

And what would that be? Her coy smile returns. "A woman doesn't reveal all her secrets," she says. [BLENDER]

>>> OUT NOW
FEFE DOBSON *ISLAND*

[She's part Gwen Stefani, part Pat Benatar.]

JEANS BY **JOE'S JEANS**; GLOVES BY **SOCKMAN**; EARRINGS BY **CLAIRE'S**; T-SHIRT, BELT AND SHOES ALL DOBSON'S OWN

ALL ABOUT ME!

FULL GIVEN NAME/AGE
Felicia Dobson, 18

BIRTHDATE
February 28, 1985

OBSESSIONS
"Good music!"

FAVORITE SONG RIGHT NOW
" 'I'm Happy Just to Dance With You,' by the Beatles."

WOULD DIE TO MEET
"Kurt Cobain and John Lennon."

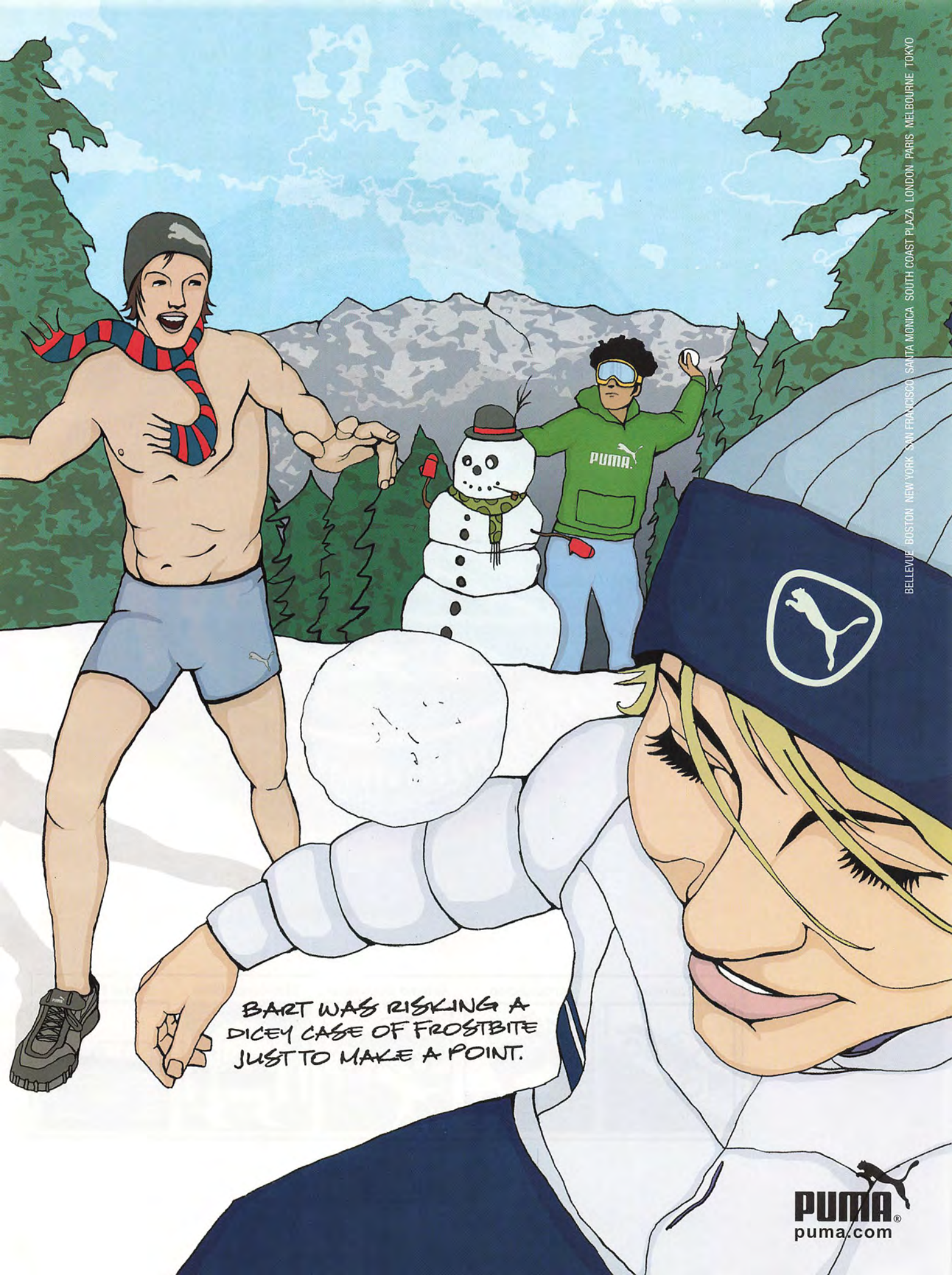
FIRST BIG PURCHASE
"My own apartment."

ROMANTICALLY ATTACHED?
"Nope."

MOST DIVA-LIKE DEMAND
"A piece of gum to chew before I go onstage."

Styling: Laces: Niki Hall and Ayana VanPutten; makeup: Andie Markoe-Byrne using Nars; hair: Derek Keith Smith

"Gravity's zero see me stall/I bounce off walls lose my footing and fall"


PUMA
BART WAS RISKING A DICEY CASE OF FROSTBITE JUST TO MAKE A POINT.
BELLEVUE BOSTON NEW YORK SAN FRANCISCO SANTA MONICA SOUTH COAST PLAZA LONDON PARIS MELBOURNE TOKYO
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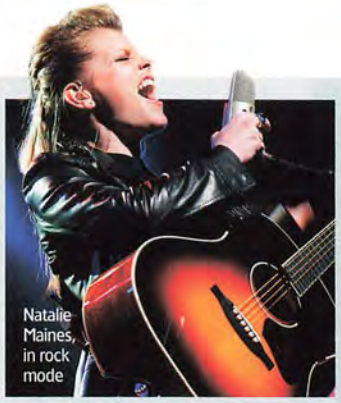


Natalie Maines, in rock mode

BETRAYED!

Why are the Dixie Chicks turning their backs on country?

>> THE DIXIE CHICKS say they're leaving country music behind.

"We don't feel part of the country scene anymore," said violinist Martie Maguire. The Grammy-winning trio experienced a fierce backlash after frontwoman Natalie Maines told a British audience she was "ashamed" that President Bush hails from her home state of Texas.

Country fans boycotted the group, and some sent death threats. "[Fans of] the Dixie Chicks most likely voted for Bush in the last election," said Alan Sledge of radio giant Clear Channel, which continues to omit the Chicks from many station playlists.

"Merle Haggard said a few nice words about us, but that was it," Maguire said. "We see ourselves as part of the larger rock & roll family." *DORIAN LYNSKEY*

PLAYLIST

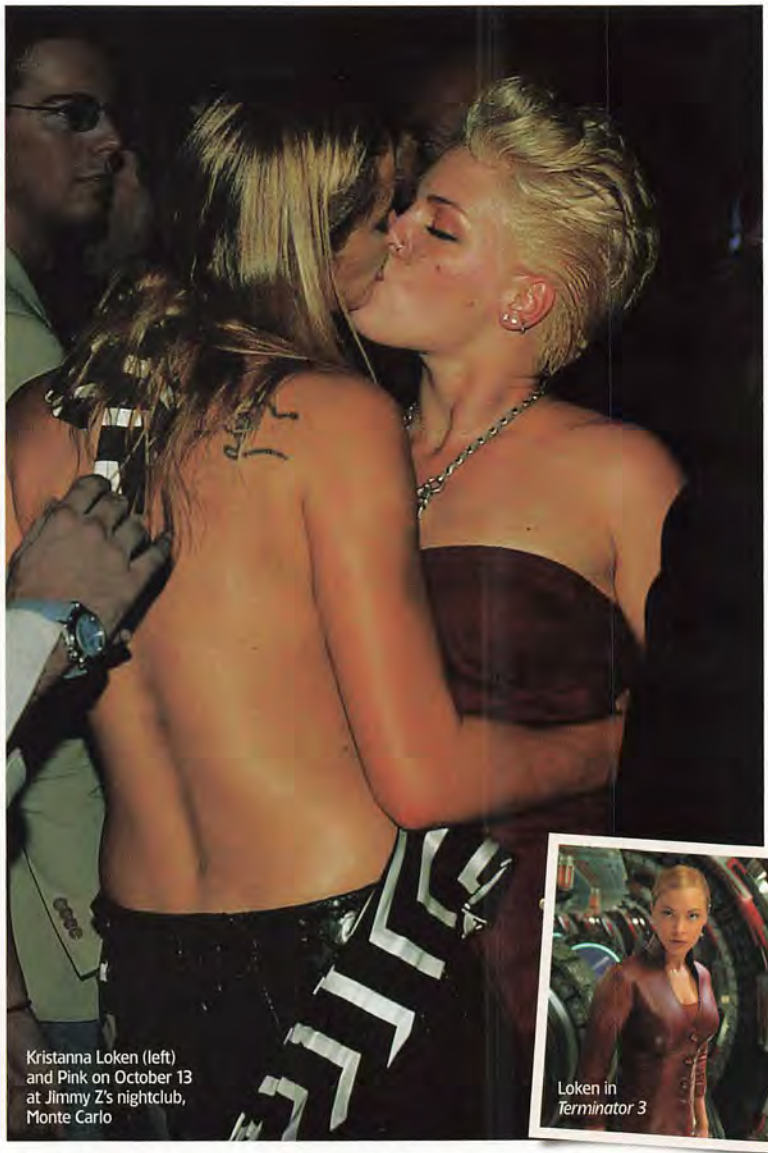
The best new songs to download!*

THE DISTILLERS
"THE HUNGER"
Brody Dalle shakes off her punk-pit-bull persona with this album track, a sensitive guitar thrasher in the style of Nirvana's "All Apologies."

MISSY ELLIOTT
"PASS THAT DUTCH"
Each Missy single is an event. Here, Timbaland mixes diabolic Diwali beats and rib-crushing bass with Missy's breathy moans and groans.

KYLIE MINOGUE
"SLOW"
Her radical departure sharply divides fans. Either the minimal electronic track is repetitive and boring, or it's hypnotizing and sexy. Your call.

BASEMENT JAXX FEATURING DIZZEE RASCAL
"LUCKY STAR"
DJs Simon Ratcliffe and Felix Buxton mix the young and angry English rapper's flashy, freewheeling style with classic garage beats for a weirdly appealing track.



Kristanna Loken (left) and Pink on October 13 at Jimmy Z's nightclub, Monte Carlo

Loken in *Terminator 3*

Pink...Triangles!

Is the newly single Pink coming out of the closet?

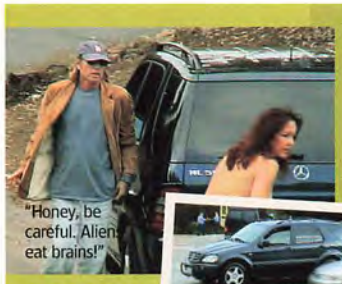
Pink and Loken on October 12 at an awards show after-party

>> PINK, SHOWN here at an after-party for the World Music Awards in Monaco in October, passionately kissed and fondled *Terminator 3* star Kristanna Loken. The following night, the pair repeated their public affection. "By the end of the night," an onlooker said, "they were practically joined at the hip."

Earlier in October, Pink gave a sexy lap dance to her gay assistant, Laura Wilson, at a New York nightclub.

Pink, who has ended her two-year relationship with male motocross star Carey Hart, recently told *Blender* most of her friends are lesbians "and they're trying to convert me." She was unavailable for further comment. *STEVE LOWE*

* Note: Not all of the "Playlist" songs are legally available for download—yet. In those instances, *Blender* encourages you to purchase the original CD. Splash News (cars, 2); Jim Spellman/Wirelmage.com (Petty); Jason Fraser (Pink and Loken, 2); Gary French (illustration)



"Honey, be careful. Aliens eat brains!"

Petty's Mercedes SUV

UFO!

Tom Petty, fearing alien abduction, nearly runs his car off the road

TOM PETTY narrowly escaped causing a serious car accident after he claimed he saw an alien spaceship. The Heartbreakers' frontman was at the wheel when he mistook a weather balloon for a UFO.

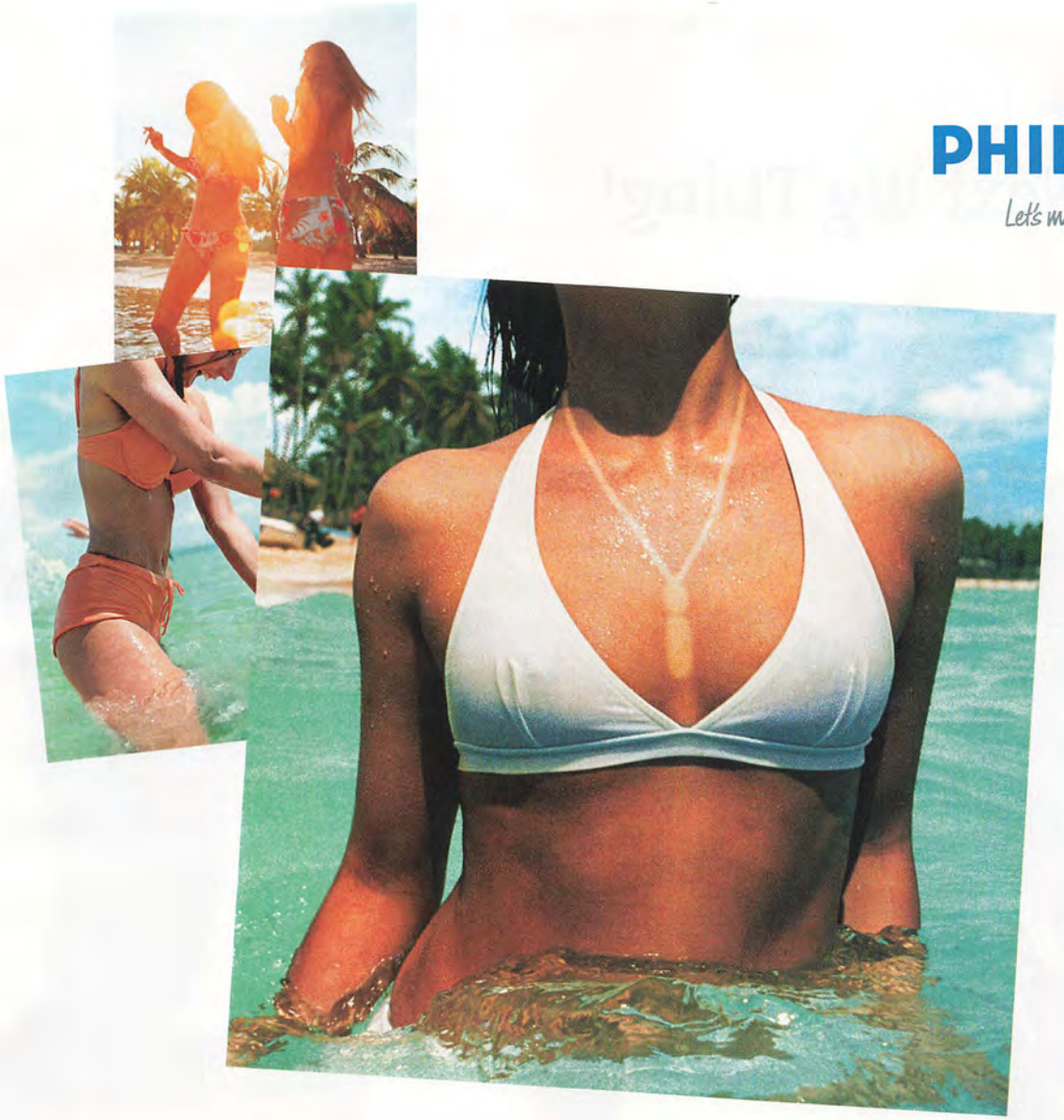
"I thought it was a flying saucer," he admitted later. "I thought, 'They're landing in Malibu!' "

A distracted Petty, on his way to Adam Sandler's wedding, then bumped into another car and drove into a throng of paparazzi. *DORIAN LYNSKEY*

WORD!

"Madonna is too old to be kissing someone who is 22."
STEVIE NICKS, 55

"Two girls kissing, confiding in love"



PHILIPS

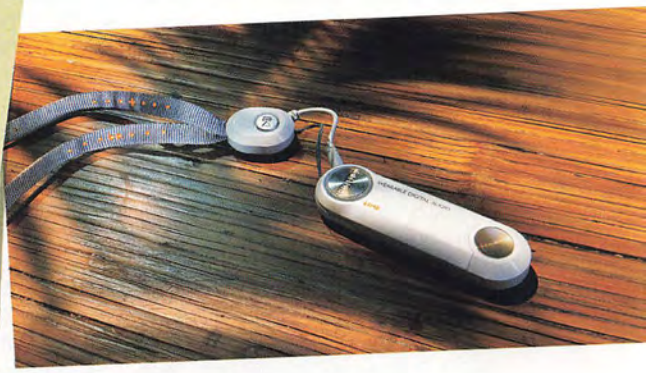
Let's make things better.

"What a great vacation, until I lost my music."—Molly, 22, San Francisco

Introducing the Philips Keyring MP3 Player, the only player with a remote control built into the neck strap. And it hooks directly up to a USB port without any software or cables. Just remember where you put it when you get undressed. Check it out at: www.thingstodoyourthing.com

Keyring MP3 player

- Wearable neckstrap with built-in remote control.
- USB direct for drag & drop music.
- No Software or cables needed.



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The Next Big Thing!

The Stills, from left: Greg Paquet, Tim Fletcher, Oliver Crowe, Dave Hamelin

[They're dominated by black moods and an epic grandeur.]

THE STILLS

What kick-started the career of this brooding Canadian foursome? Drugs!

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEOFF MOORE

>> WE FIND Tim Fletcher, the enigmatic frontman for Montreal's Stills, on a good day, and for this perhaps we should be grateful. Currently on tour with their good friends Interpol, the Stills are slowly accepting their new reality: a life of feverish expectation, hype and impending fame.

Proclaiming his band "neurotic freaks" and "head cases," Fletcher can barely complete a sentence without the word *paranoia.* But today, his mood is significantly upbeat. "It's sunny out," he says, pointing at the window.

Like Interpol, the Stills — Fletcher, 25, plus guitarist Greg Paquet, bassist Oliver Crowe and drummer Dave Hamelin, all 23 — walk in the long shadow cast by British miserablists Joy Division. Their debut, *Logic Will Break Your Heart,* is a vividly arresting record dominated by black moods and an epic grandeur that calls to mind the Smiths and the Cure.

"Our sound is very stark and full of anxiety," he admits. "We write about love and the fear of losing, you know, love."

The band got together 18 months ago thanks, Fletcher suggests, to a drug-trafficking friend in need of some cash. Finding himself adrift in London, Fletcher's buddy called and instructed him to go to his house in Montreal and take anything he wanted, within reason, and then send him the money.

"We took a four-track recorder and sent him $100, and that started us off," he says.

While the Stills recorded their album, they listened to U.K. indie act Belle and Sebastian, dressed exclusively in black and smoked a hell of a lot of cigarettes. And thus their soul-searching, anxiety-wracked image was born.

"It's great touring America because it's a beautiful country," Fletcher says, "but I miss home. We all have girlfriends, and it can be difficult maintaining relationships when you're on the road." Crow's feet begin to cramp his eyes. He struggles to stay upbeat. "But if you have love, you always have hope, don't you?"

And if not? Well, then, he can always write a song about it. . . . [BLENDER]

ALL ABOUT US!

OUR FAVORITE MOVIES ON THE TOUR BUS
"Annie Hall, The Party, The Hustler."

OBSESSIONS
Singer Tim Fletcher: "Fame, money, power."

OUR FAVORITE SONG RIGHT NOW
" 'Rhiannon,' by Fleetwood Mac."

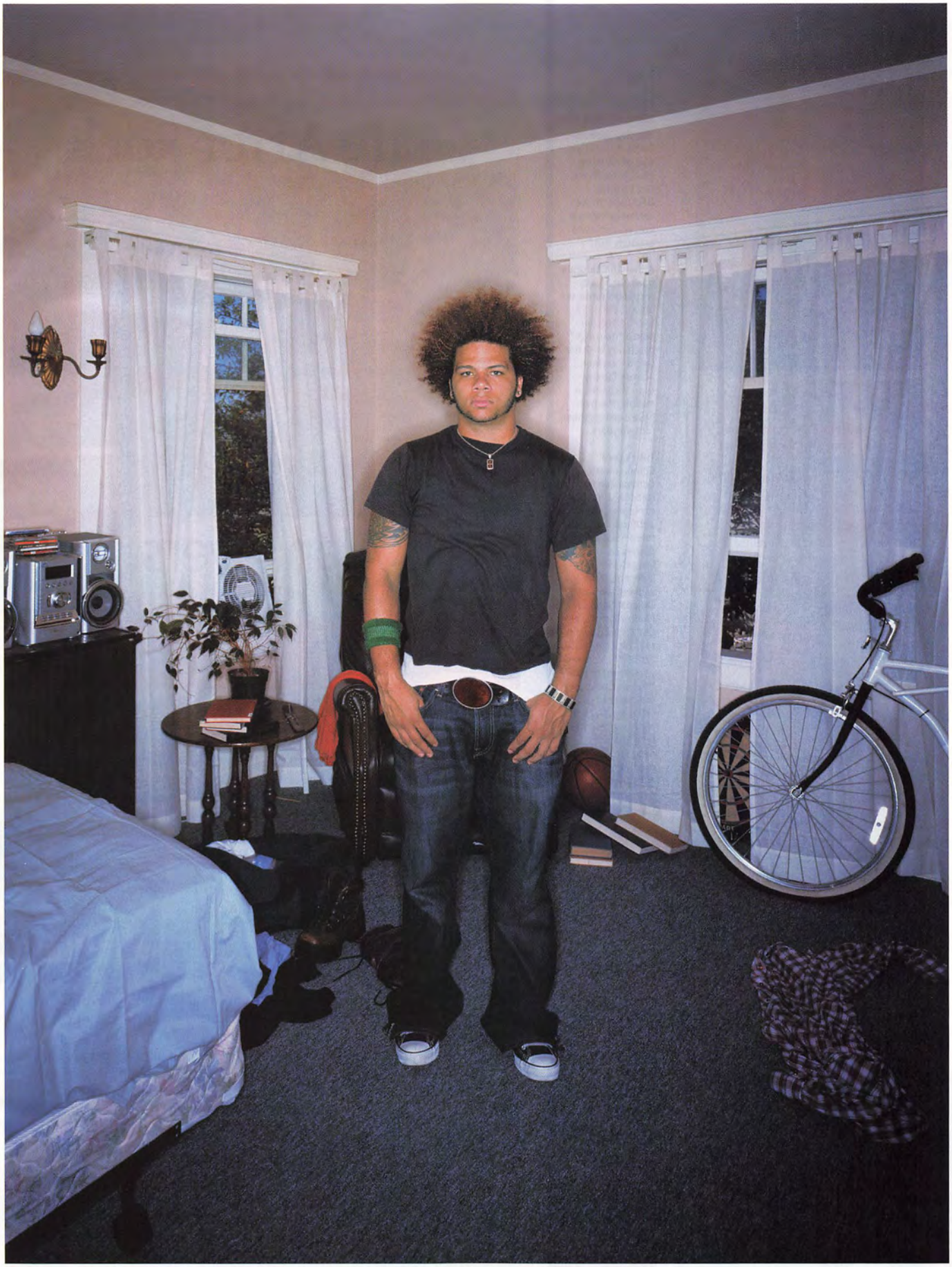
WON'T TOUR WITHOUT
Guitarist Greg Paquet: "The Replacements' *Let It Be* album."

HOW OFTEN WE SAY "HOSER"
"Bimonthly."

SADDEST THING EVER
Bassist Oliver Crowe: "D-minor, the saddest of chords."

CAUSE FOR PARANOIA
Drummer Dave Hamelin: "People who don't know where Montreal is."

>>> OUT NOW
LOGIC WILL BREAK YOUR HEART *VICE*



I'm not a diva, but I play one on TV.

Anyone smell a "Lil' Kim Watch" brewing? . . .

FLUFFY!

Lil' Kim issues bizarre demands, dates 50 Cent shooting suspect

>> AS THE HOST of England's Music of Black Origin (MOBO) awards, Brooklyn rapstress Lil' Kim shocked organizers with extensive — and flamboyant — backstage requests.

Lil' Kim (real name Kimberly Jones) demanded a dressing room in London's Royal Albert Hall equipped with three furry pink walls and a giant mirror on the fourth; the thermostat was to be set at precisely 89.6 degrees. A feng shui expert verified the furniture arrangement.

Wall covering or Day-Glo merkin?

"These are some pretty unusual demands," said a source, "but Lil' Kim is a very unusual lady."

Stateside, Kim's boyfriend, Damion Hardy, has been investigated in connection with a September incident in which shots were fired at 50 Cent and his entourage. A few hours before the shooting, 50 Cent taunted Kim on New York's Hot 97 radio: "I wrote 'Magic Stick'/I gave Kim a hit/Then I refused to shoot the video, she threw a little fit." *NOEL BODDIE*

Tell Us a Joke!

SIMON LE BON
DURAN DURAN

"How many lead singers does it take to screw in a light bulb? One, as long as everyone is watching."

AS TOLD TO PHIL McCRACKEN

News Roundup!

Hip-hop producer **DAMON DASH** has said of his latest charge, ex–Spice Girl Victoria Beckham, "If we can make Victoria hot, we can make anybody hot."

Although California does not legally recognize same-sex unions, **MELISSA ETHERIDGE** has held a "marriage" ceremony with her lesbian partner, actress Tammy Lynn Michaels, in Malibu. The pair have been together for two years.

The Federal Communications Commission has ruled that **BONO**'s expletive-laced outburst during the televised Golden Globes ceremony last year was not indecent. Upon winning for Best Original Song — Motion Picture, he said, "This is really, really fucking brilliant!" The commission deemed that "The word *fucking* may be crude and offensive, but in the context presented here, did not describe sexual or excretory organs or activities."

WORD!

"Thank you, Brazil!"

ALANIS MORISSETTE, AT THE END OF A CONCERT IN LIMA, PERU

★ Where Are They Now? ★

Life After Rock

Nerd suspects in No. 2 lead-pencil heist

Alan Myers

of Devo

THEN! Drummer, 1976–1985

NOW! Electrician, Los Angeles

>> "DEVO WAS A LOT of fun at the beginning, because we were out on the edge and nobody knew what to think of us. It was a very pure time. There were no expectations, and there wasn't a lot of strategizing. We had a spearhead of an idea, and we worked hard to insert it into popular culture.

"Our live shows would get stripped down to a visceral element. I loved traveling around the country and knocking people back on their heels.

"The most interesting and exciting period was my first few years in the group. The [subsequent] popularity of 'Whip It' and the *Freedom of Choice* album was not as stimulating to me.

"By 1985, the initial creative burst didn't seem to rekindle, and we weren't interacting the way we had been. Also, I had a child, and I wanted to be able to spend time with her.

"What I do now is based on yogic meditation."

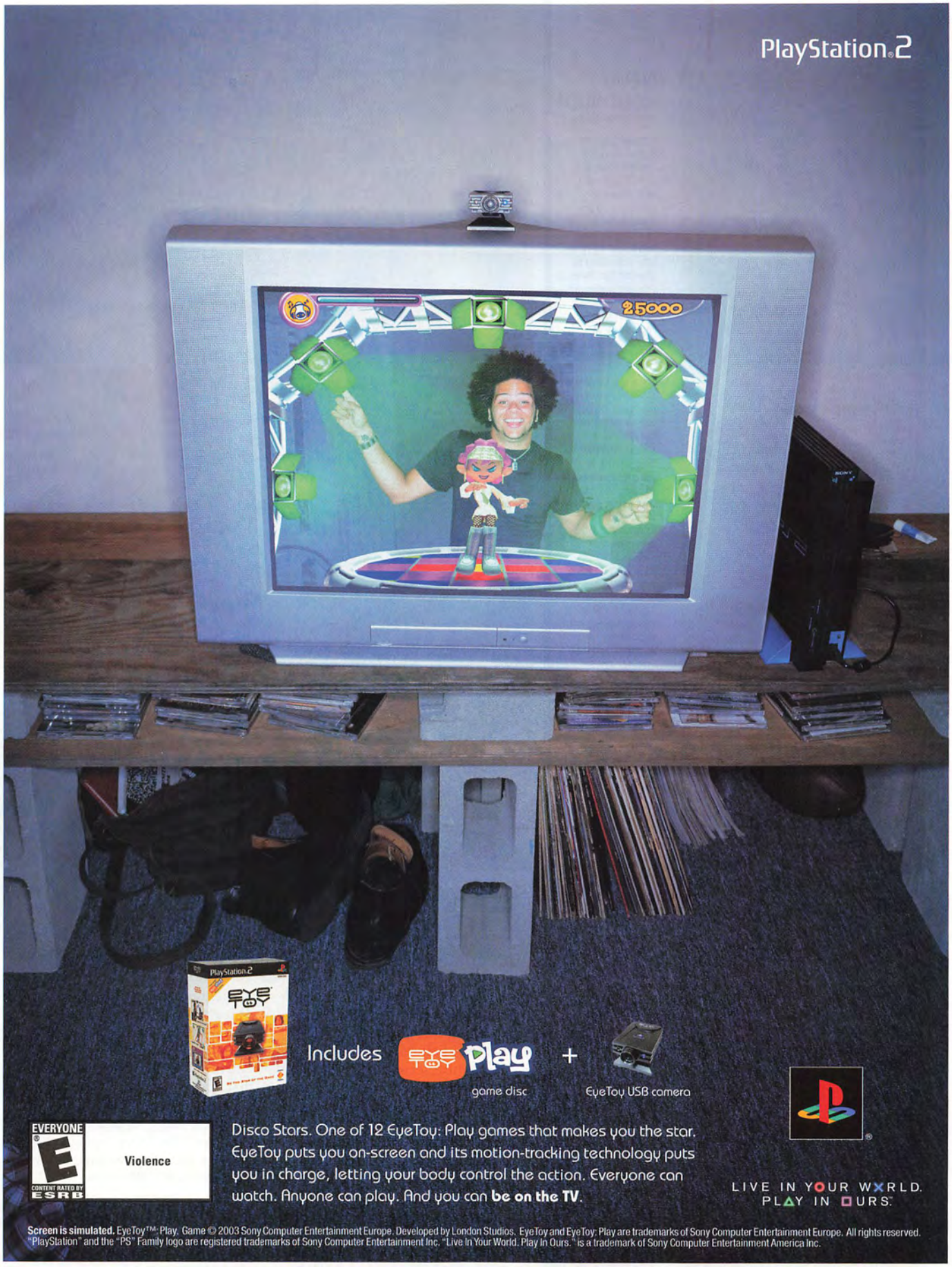
"Construction is fun. It's just a bunch of guys. We get together and figure out how to build something every day.

"My company is called Skyline Electric. My typical customer is a young couple who might have just purchased an older home in the Los Angeles area, and they need to upgrade it. My gimmick is to be straight with people, try to give them what their vision is and then charge them a fair price. I get plenty of referrals.

Yes, they are potheads.

"Most of what I do now is based on a philosophy that draws from yogic meditation. The goal is to regress into the essence of what we're made of without the distractions of all the different concerns of physical reality. It could be termed a very earnest attempt at de-evolution." *AS TOLD TO JON REGARDIE*

Grayson Alexander/Retna Ltd. (Lil' Kim); Alphonse Telymonde (still-life); Stephen Lovekin/FilmMagic.com (Le Bon); Barry Schultz/Sunshine/Retna Ltd. (Devo, top); courtesy of Alan Myers (Myers); Chris Walter/Retna Ltd. (Devo, bottom); Gary French (illustration)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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence
Disco Stars. One of 12 EyeToy: Play games that makes you the star. EyeToy puts you on-screen and its motion-tracking technology puts you in charge, letting your body control the action. Everyone can watch. Anyone can play. And you can be on the TV.
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PLAY IN OURS.
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David Bowie points to the planet he just purchased.

UPCOMING TOURS

ARTISTS! DATES! CITIES! YEAH!

DAVID BOWIE

>> Bowie, gearing up for his first mammoth trek since 1995, says his band's in such good form, "it would be foolish not to tour." A set that changes nightly spans his career.

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ THE BORGATA, *DEC. 6* • **FAIRFAX, VA** PATRIOT CENTER, *DEC. 7* • **BOSTON** FLEET CENTER, *DEC. 9* • **PHILADELPHIA** WACHOVIA CENTER, *DEC. 10* • **NEW YORK** MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, *DEC. 15* • **CLEVELAND** CSU CONVOCATION CENTER, *JAN. 7* • **AUBURN HILLS, MI** PALACE AT AUBURN HILLS, *JAN. 9* • **MINNEAPOLIS** TARGET CENTER, *JAN. 11* • **CHICAGO** ROSEMONT THEATRE, *JAN. 13–14, 16* • **DENVER** FILLMORE AUDITORIUM, *JAN. 19* • **SEATTLE** PARAMOUNT THEATRE, *JAN. 25* • **SAN JOSE, CA** HP PAVILION, *JAN. 27*

ROCKET FROM THE TOMBS

Until recently, RFTT were a thing of unheard wonder. The 2002 collection *The Day the Earth Met the Rocket From the Tombs* resurrected these mid-'70s Cleveland punk originators, and now, the original lineup (plus Television's Richard Lloyd) is touring, perhaps for the last time. "The whole thing may blow apart any moment, so don't pretend that you can see it next year," singer David Thomas warns.

DETROIT MAGIC STICK, *DEC. 3* • **CAMBRIDGE, MA** TT THE BEAR'S, *DEC. 6* • **NEW ORLEANS** HOUSE OF BLUES, *DEC. 10*

DAVE MATTHEWS AND FRIENDS

>> Billed as "An Acoustic and Electric Evening With Dave Matthews and Friends," this tour covers most bases. The "friends" include Tim Reynolds, Phish guitarist Trey Anastasio and others. Matthews digs live taping, so bring the recorder.

STATE COLLEGE, PA BRYCE JORDAN CENTER, *DEC. 12* • **PROVIDENCE, RI** DUNKIN' DONUTS CIVIC CENTER, *DEC. 13* • **PHILADELPHIA** WACHOVIA CENTER, *DEC. 15* • **BOSTON** FLEET-CENTER, *DEC. 16* • **NEW YORK** MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, *DEC. 17* • **HARTFORD, CT** HARTFORD CIVIC CENTER, *DEC. 19* • **ROCHESTER, NY** BLUE CROSS ARENA, *DEC. 20* • **CHICAGO** ALLSTATE ARENA, *DEC. 22* • **SEATTLE** KEY ARENA, *JAN. 12* • **SAN DIEGO** COX ARENA, *JAN. 14* • **LOS ANGELES** STAPLES CENTER, *JAN. 15* • **OAKLAND, CA** OAKLAND ARENA, *JAN. 16*

* For up-to-date information, check artists' Web sites and local listings.

News Roundup!

Adjusting to life outside prison is challenging for **OL' DIRTY BASTARD**, who recently turned up to the video shoot for his new single "Want You Back" 12 hours late, according to director Jim Jones. "He was supposed to show up at 10 A.M., but he showed up at 10 P.M.," Jones said. "But I love him!"

For a week in early October, for the first time ever, the top 10 places on the *Billboard* singles chart were held by African-American artists. Topping the chart was "Baby Boy," by **BEYONCÉ** and **SEAN PAUL**. Other artists on the chart included **THE BLACK EYED PEAS** and **P. DIDDY**.

CÉLINE DION is collaborating with acclaimed Australian photographer Anne Geddes on a series of artistic mother-and-baby shots. The project will be called *Miracle*.

WORD!

"I would like to win it, but I don't think that's possible due to my schedule."

P. DIDDY, ON THE NEW YORK CITY MARATHON

Britney Spears: "Do I look like I'm sending secret messages?"

Spears's alleged stalker, Japanese entrepreneur Masahiko Shizawa

Hair-Raising

Did Britney send "secret messages" to her stalker via her hair?

>> BRITNEY SPEARS HAS won a second injunction against a Japanese businessman who reportedly believed the pop star was sending him secret messages through her ever-changing hairdos.

Spears originally sought legal action against 42-year-old Yokohama software entrepreneur Masahiko Shizawa in December 2002, alleging that he "tracked" the singer to her Hollywood home and sent photographs of himself along with notes reading "I'm chasing you."

After posting a copy of her initial restraining-order request and his photograph on a Spears fan site, Shizawa allegedly continued to harass the 21-year-old star with repeated faxes.

His lawyers, however, insisted that Spears was guilty of exaggeration and that Shizawa was "in love with her." "All of the allegations are stale," they argued. "It's her own bizarre problems, her own psychological difficulties."

The judge found in Spears's favor and issued an order that Shizawa stay more than 300 yards away from her for the next three years. *NICK DUERDEN*

Jerrey Eng/Scanpix/Retna Ltd. (Bowie); Theo Wargo/WireImage.com (Matthews); Gary French (illustration)

Heineken Drops Rapper From World Tour for Using Phrase "Bling, Bling" Too Much

Mad Rhymes trying hard to play it cool.

PHILADELPHIA, PA—Having secured his place in the rap pantheon, Mad Rhymes was shocked to find out from his agent that he had been dropped from the Heineken World Tour for saying "Bling, bling" all the time.

Following the news, Mad Rhymes told friends close to him, "But yo, that's my schtick." Jason Levine, Rhymes' agent, believes Rhymes will be back on tour shortly. Just as soon as he proves he can go a few days without saying it.

But many artists guilty of over-using trendy catch phrases believe quitting won't be so easy. MC Beatz, who popularized phrases like "That's Dope" and "That's Fly" and worked with a friend to come up with "That's Fresh" back in the late 80's, told reporters, "I still say 'That's Fly' sometimes."

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Heineken

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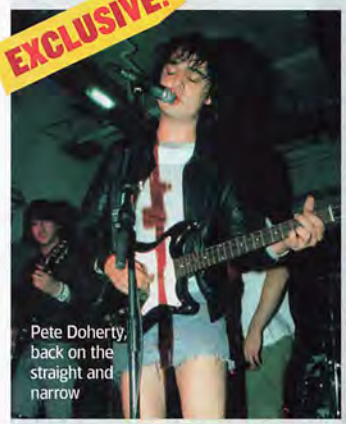


Pete Doherty, back on the straight and narrow

FREE!

Out of jail, Libertines singer quits crack and rejoins band

>> THE LIBERTINES have re-formed following singer Pete Doherty's release from prison. Doherty served a one-month sentence for robbing bandmate Carl Barat's apartment over the summer.

Barat collected self-confessed drug addict Doherty from London's Wandsworth Prison on October 8. That evening, the Libertines played the first of a series of unannounced reunion shows. After a performance to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of their record label, Rough Trade, Doherty told *Blender* the band would be returning to the studio soon.

"People say you don't know what you've got until it's gone," Doherty said. "Well, I know what we've got, and I nearly threw it all away. It was a choice: crack or Carlos [Barat]. And I chose Carlos."

The Libertines

According to Doherty, he and Barat kept in touch while he was in jail. "I sent him a few letters, and he sent me a postcard with pictures of pigs on it," Doherty said. "I remember what it said word for word: 'Dear Biggles. I got your letters. I've started a few myself. I'm coming to visit you on Tuesday. Ever, Albion. Love, Biggles.'"

The Libertines, firing their management, have signed with Creation Records' Alan McGee. *DORIAN LYNSKEY*

"It was a choice: crack or Carlos. I chose Carlos."

News Roundup!

After being dropped by Island/Def Jam, the upbeat brothers in HANSON are releasing their third studio album, *Underneath*, on their own indie label, 3CG.

Rancid frontman TIM ARMSTRONG has preempted criticism from the punk community about his decision to work with PINK. "If people are gonna give me shit for working with the best woman vocalist in the world right now, then let them give me shit," he said.

MARIAH CAREY is reportedly seeking a seven-figure deal for a book she is planning to write with acclaimed music biographer David Ritz. The work will focus on her ability to overcome adversity.

The Yeah Yeah Yeahs' singer, KAREN O, who frequently drinks excessively during performances, was recently hospitalized in Sydney, Australia, after falling offstage four songs into the band's set.

WORD!

"It's boring."

BARBRA STREISAND, ON SINGING HER OWN SONGS

Fiona Apple caught red-handed . . . playing piano

In the Studio

"Optimistic!"

Fiona Apple follows up her dark 1999 masterpiece *When the Pawn* . . . with something a bit more humorous

>> "PERSONALLY, I THINK humiliation is worse than death," Fiona Apple says, taking a break from mixing her first record in more than three years. "Not that death is OK; it's just that humiliation is something you have to live with."

Rock's reigning philosopher-chanteuse hasn't lost her dark edge during her hiatus from the spotlight. But according to those who know her best, she has lightened up a bit. "These songs definitely show more of her sense of humor," says producer Jon Brion, who worked with Apple on her last release, 1999's critically lauded, commercially overlooked album *When the Pawn*. . . .

One song, "Better Version of Me," began as a litany of personal put-downs. "By the last verse, I realized that all of the qualities that make you feel unequipped in life can be turned around to your own advantage," she says. "It actually became sort of optimistic."

Apple chalks that up less to a newly rosy outlook than to just growing up. "I'm still the same," says the 26-year-old. "I still have horrible days, but I started to look at them with more appreciation as an observer. Rather than 'I feel horrible and I want to die,' now it's more like, 'Isn't that interesting how I want to die right now? I wonder how I'll feel five minutes from now.'"

The new songs are filled with woodwinds and strings, but they're never limp. As for the album's title, Apple is keeping mum.

"If you knew what the title was," she says, smiling mysteriously, "you would know why I can't tell you." Right. *OLIVER JONES*

ALL ABOUT MY ALBUM!

ARTIST
Fiona Apple

STUDIO
Paramour in Los Angeles

PRODUCER
Jon Brion

LAST RECORD
When the Pawn . . . (EPIC, 1999)

NEW RECORD
So far untitled; due early 2004

Clipse's Malice (left) and Pusha T: Sports fans

ALSO IN THE STUDIO >>>>

<< CLIPSE are finishing tracks for *Hell Hath No Fury*, the follow-up to their platinum 2003 debut, in Hovercraft Studios in Virginia Beach. It's due mid-February. . . .

BEN KWELLER is in Sear Sound studios in New York City with producer Ethan Johns working on his as-yet-untitled sophomore record, due in early 2004. . . .

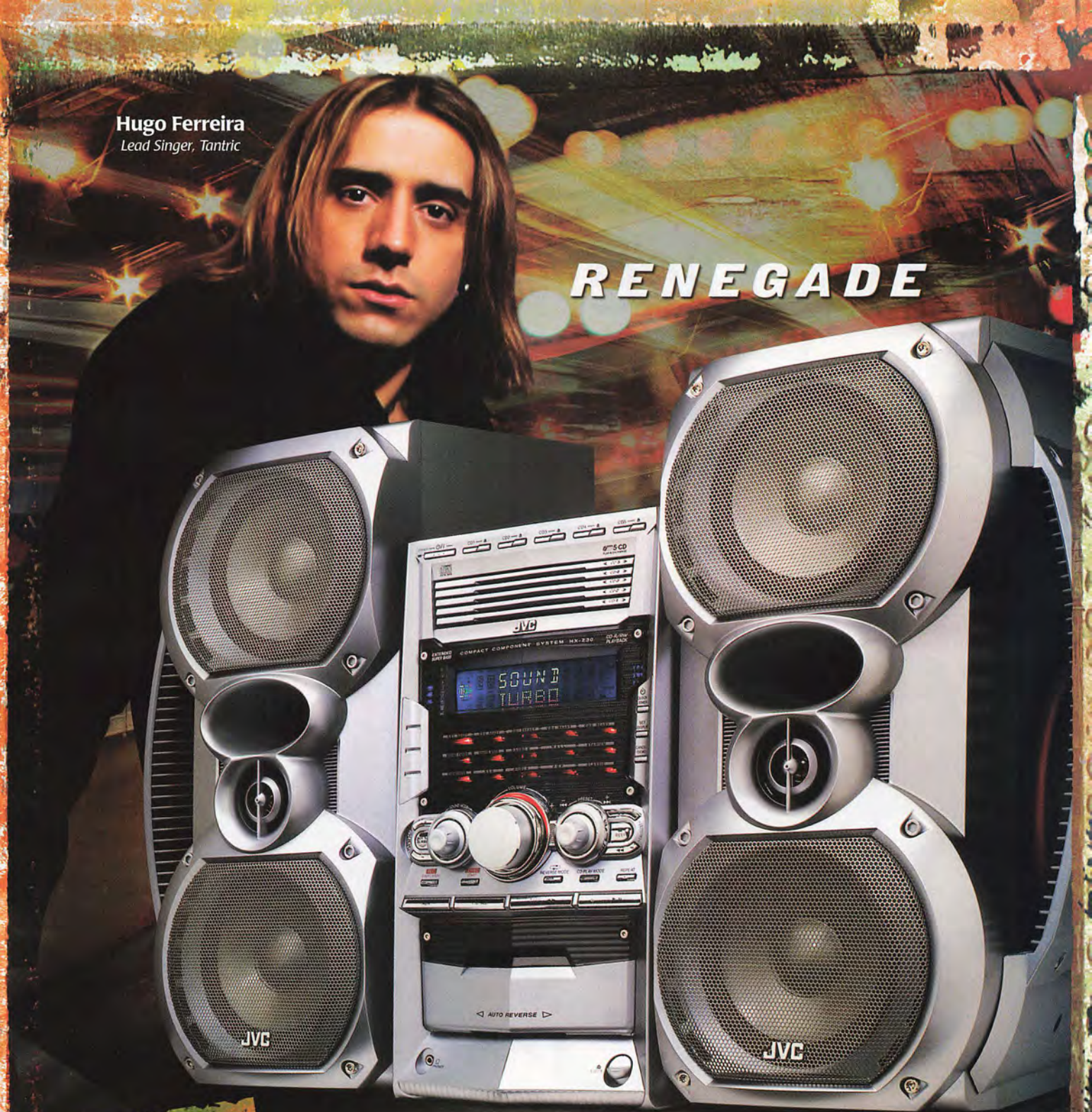
MELISSA AUF DER MAUR is in Los Angeles recording her solo debut. **JAMES IHA** and **JOSH HOMME** are cowriting some songs for the album, due in the spring. . . .

DAN THE AUTOMATOR and Glassjaw's **DARYL PALUMBO** are in San Francisco working on their electronic project Head Automatica, due in February. . . .

Nathan Seabrook/Redferns/Retna Ltd. (Libertines, top); Roger Sargent/Idols (Libertines, bottom); Lionel Deluy (Apple); Elgin Edmands/Retna Ltd. (Clipse); Gary French (illustration)

Hugo Ferreira
Lead Singer, Tantric

RENEGADE



You never know what can happen around JVC's "Tower of Power." With its 540 awe-inspiring watts and mind-blowing twin hyper power-drive subwoofers, the HX-Z30 will make heads turn and jaws drop. And the MP3 playback allows you to record up to 100 songs on a single disc. On the long drives in-between gigs, or backstage before a show, I like to get amped-up listening to JVC's portable cd player. All my MP3s are there when I need them. All that power in the palm of your hand is too hot to ignore. This is what legends are made of.

IDEAL GUITARS

*Not final artwork. Keep an eye out for Tantric's new album available Summer 2003 on Maverick Records.

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Useful Tips From the Stars!

HOW TO . . .

Shoot Dice

The *tres hombres* of **ZZ Top** have been rocking for three decades, and they know how to gamble with "bones." Here, guitarist Billy Gibbons explains the basic steps . . .

BY VICTORIA DESILVERIO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEGO

1 PUT UP GREEN!

"Take a deep breath, dig into your pockets and grab some green. Throw that trash cash on the felt and say, 'Change, please,' at which time the chip boss will slide round discs back to you. Make a big bet by laying a pile on the table in plain view. Await your betting comrades to lay 'em on down right with you."

2 PICK DA BONES!

"Pick your favorite pair of bones from the stickman. You gotta grab the lucky ones — the ones you just *know* are for you. Trust that synchronous selection! Go ahead and grab 'em, take 'em and shake 'em, 'cause you know you're gonna break 'em! Think about your favorite ZZ Top song playing *loud* in your head!"

3 ROLL 'EM!

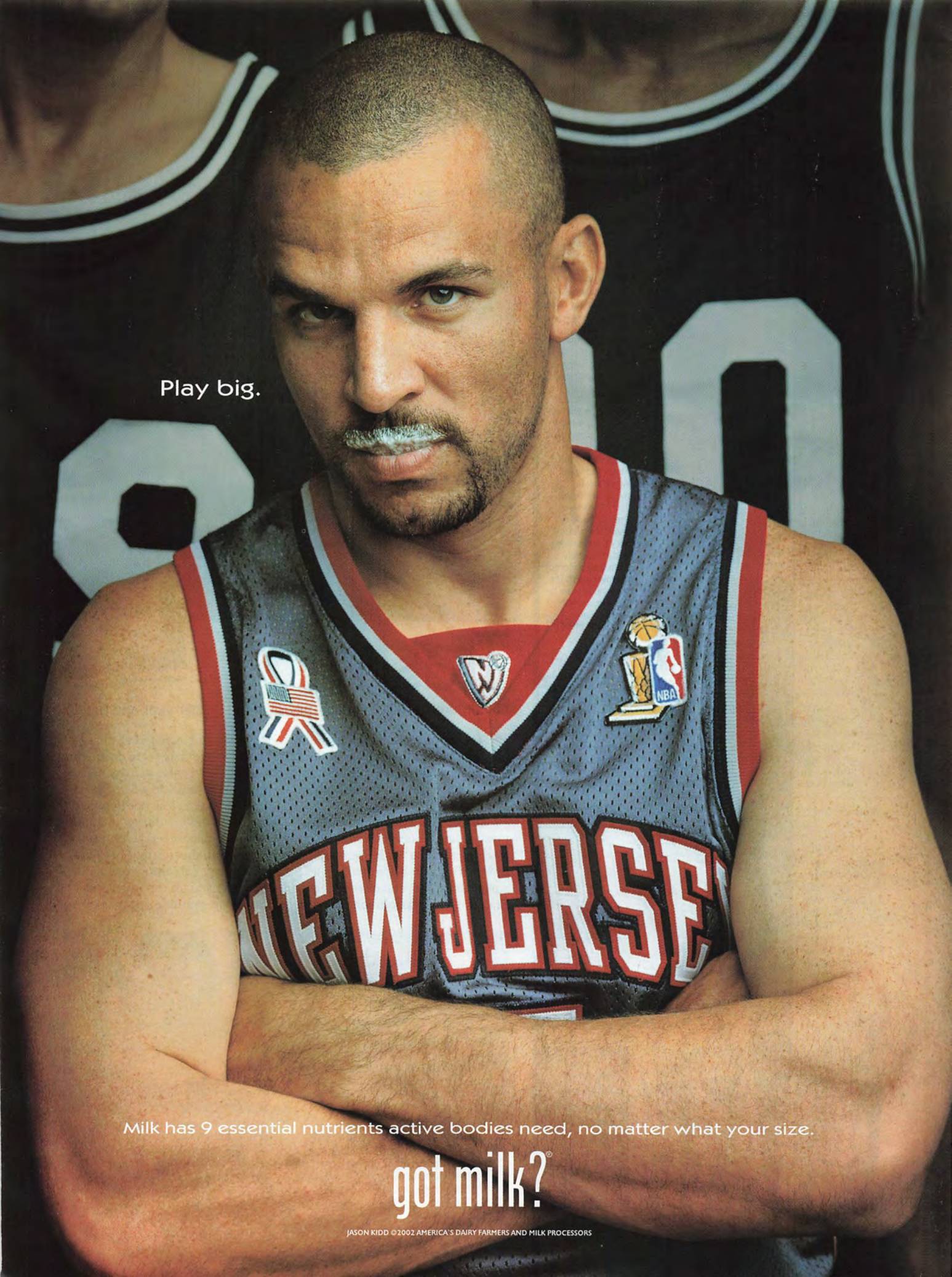
"Roll those suckers hard, hot and heavy. Hit the far side of the table, and wait and see what you get. Seven and 11 win. Two, three or 12 craps out, loser. The rest of the numbers place you as the players' hopeful 'friend or foe' — they will bet either for or against you getting that number on your second roll."

ZZ Top, from left: Frank Beard, Dusty Hill, Billy Gibbons

4 KEEP ROLLIN'!

"If you didn't win or crap out, you are 'hittin' a point.' So keep slammin' them cubes until you get the same number as your first roll. If you hit a seven, you're out! But when you hit your number square, you're gonna shout, 'Thank you, brother!' That's when you grab your stash of cash and then run like hell!"

→ ZZ TOP'S NEW GREATEST-HITS BOX SET, *CHROME, SMOKE & BBQ* (WARNER BROS.), IS OUT NOW.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Mariah snoozes between bras.

MARIAH CAREY, BREAST LOOSE IS THE NEW MARIAH CAREY, SCREW LOOSE

AND OTHER LATE-BREAKING DEVELOPMENTS

The New Tom Green Show getting canceled	is the new	*Tom Green Show* getting canceled
Photos of Paris Hilton flashing her cooch	are the new	Photos of Paris Hilton kissing her pooch
Painkiller and vodka	is the new	Red Bull and vodka
Actresses romantically linked with Fred Durst	are the new	Musicians romantically linked with Winona Ryder
Rush Limbaugh, pill-popping, bloviating radio host	is the new	Rush Limbaugh, bloviating radio host
Prince Harry watching cattle graze on grass in Aussie outback	is the new	Prince Harry taking a toke of grass in the English countryside
Dwight Gooden Jr., alleged crack-cocaine dealer	is the new	Dwight Gooden Sr., alleged crack-cocaine user
Getting mauled by tigers	is the new	Getting mauled by groupies
Jessica Simpson	is the new	Suzanne Somers

News Roundup!

Embattled R&B singer **R. KELLY**, who faces 21 child-pornography charges, has praised the support of his wife, Andrea Lee, the mother of his two children. "Just as in any relationship, you have your ups and downs," he said. "In this particular situation, my wife has been very strong."

An **ELVIS PRESLEY** museum in England is fighting with the British government over plans to import six of the King's handguns. According to museum director Jerry Goldman, Presley "used to shoot at his cars if they failed to start and at squirrels from the comfort of his toilet seat." The guns include the Derringer pistol Presley wore onstage in one of his boots.

JACK OSBOURNE is slated to appear on another reality TV program, a British production called *Celebrity Fit Club*, in which overweight stars undergo a fitness course run by a strict marine sergeant.

WORD!

"Beige is the color you get when you mix Pink with the crap she records."
JACK BLACK

Aretha's yard shown little *r-e-s-p-e-c-t.*

Lady of Soul, getting fined

Trashy!

Millionaire Aretha Franklin fails to clean up her year-old mess

>> SOUL LEGEND Aretha Franklin has been cited a fourth time by local officials for failing to clean up fire-related debris on the lawn of her $1.2 million mansion.

On October 25, 2002, a blaze ravaged her Bloomfield Township, Michigan, home while she was on tour in Texas. Police initially suspected arson, and questioned Franklin's 45-year-old son, Edward. He was later cleared of all charges, but the singer has yet to do anything about the extensive damage, resulting most recently in a $225 fine.

Several priceless items were destroyed in the inferno, including a grand piano, several Grammy awards and dresses that Franklin, 61, had been planning to donate to the Smithsonian Institute. She refused to comment. *NICK DUERDEN*

Weird Band Alert!

PINK STËËL

New York duo rocks homosexually!

THAT'S PINK STËËL AS IN . . .
Oh, yes. Meet Udo Von DüYü and Hanson Jobb, who make up Germany's premier gay heavy-metal band (except they're really New Yorkers Ken Grobe and Alex Brewer). Numbers include "We Fight for Cock," "I'm Comin' Out (All Over You)" and "Sausage Party."

SO, WHAT'S A PINK STËËL SHOW LIKE?
A recent performance in New York climaxed with the gay/straight crowd going topless, while penis-shaped balloon animals and silly string shot from Jobb's crotch.

Pink Stëël: Get it? Get it?

DOES THE "STRAIGHT" METAL SCENE EMBRACE THEM?
"We hear the word *suck* a lot, but usually in a sexy way!" Von DüYü reckons. Look out for their forthcoming opus, *Out at the Devil*, which promises "gay metal at its hardest." *STEVE LOWE*

Dave Hogan/Getty Images (Carey); Splash News (Franklin, Franklin's yard); H L/MPTV (Somers); Chris Weeks/Filmmagic.com (Simpson); Randy Wells/Corbis (tiger); Richard Gillard/Camera Press/Retna Ltd. (Prince Harry); Gregg DeGuire/Wireimage.com (Hilton); Gary French (illustration)

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Jack Osbourne: "Dude, where's my bar?"

HIGH TIMES

Did Jack Osbourne do drugs with MTV crew members?

>> JACK OSBOURNE HAS claimed he took drugs with the MTV crew behind *The Osbournes,* and then contradicted the assertion.

Calling some of the behind-the-scenes crew "stoners," he claimed he regularly got high with them. "They'd be on night shift, sitting around playing cards, and I'd be like, 'Bong hits for everyone!' " he revealed.

In a later interview, Osbourne, a minor who last April entered rehab for alcohol and OxyContin abuse, claimed that the MTV employees urged restraint. "[They] would take me aside and tell me to mellow out for a week or so, but they're not allowed to [interfere]," he noted. MTV refused to comment. *STEVE LOWE*

This is not an outlet mall.

THUG LIFE?

Gangsta 50 Cent moves to the Connecticut countryside

RAPPER 50 CENT has bought a Farmington, Connecticut, mansion that once belonged to Mike Tyson. The ex-crack dealer from Queens paid $4.1 million for the 48,000-square-foot, 17-acre property, which has 18 bedrooms, servants' quarters and a boathouse.

Local officials say they are preparing for 50 Cent's arrival: "He is a citizen, and we are concerned for his safety as well as the safety of the public," police said. *VICTORIA DeSILVERIO*

News Roundup!

BEYONCÉ recently prevented her father and manager, Mathew Knowles, from attending the video shoot for "Crazy in Love" on the grounds that he was uncomfortable about her sexual poses.

One hundred seventy-two **LIMPBIZKIT** fans have launched a class-action lawsuit against the band after its Chicago performance on the Summer Sanitarium tour ended after 17 minutes. The band was supposed to play for 90 minutes, but after being pelted with garbage by the crowd, they responded with homophobic and sexually explicit slurs before leaving the stage.

MICHAEL JACKSON, eager to get out of his contract with Sony and pay off his increasing debt, is issuing a greatest-hits package. The collection, ***Number Ones,*** includes a new track, "One More Chance," cowritten with **R. KELLY**.

Elliott Smith, April 2000

Elliott Smith 1969–2003

The Oscar-nominated singer-songwriter, 34, died in his Los Angeles home of an apparent suicide October 21

>> FOLK-ROCK ARTIST Elliott Smith, who had a history of depression, is believed to have committed suicide at his home by stabbing himself in the chest.

Hailing from Omaha, Nebraska, Smith — born Steven Paul Smith on August 6, 1969 — released five albums over the past decade. His last, *Figure 8*, came out in 2000. While he maintained a cult following that cherished his shambling, melodic confessions, he reached an ambivalent commercial peak in 1998. His song "Miss Misery," which appeared on the soundtrack to Gus Van Sant's *Good Will Hunting*, received an Oscar nomination.

Smith's debilitating depression hounded him.

At age 21, he formed the punk band Heatmiser before concentrating on his largely acoustic solo work, the lush sensitivity of which brought him comparisons to such '70s balladeers as Paul Simon and Nick Drake.

Smith's debilitating depression, along with a drug habit, forever hounded him: His eponymous 1995 album was subsequently described (though not by him) as his "heroin record." Two years later, he was committed, against his will, to a psychiatric hospital.

The success he achieved rarely pleased him. In 1998, his crossover album *XO* yielded a hit single in "Waltz #2." "I'm sick of that song," he later said, refusing to play it live. When "Miss Misery" failed to garner an Oscar — it went to Céline Dion's theme from *Titanic* — he felt relief rather than disappointment. "I'm glad I didn't win," he said. *NICK DUERDEN*

OBITS

PAUL BURLISON
74, September 27, in Horn Lake, Mississippi, of cancer. Rockabilly guitarist who teamed with Johnny and Dorsey Burnette to form the Rock & Roll Trio. His signature song "Train Kept A-Rollin' " became a rock standard.

ROBERT PALMER
54, September 26, in Paris, of a heart attack. Well-tailored, two-time Grammy-winning British rock singer best known for his iconic 1985 music video "Addicted to Love," which featured look-alike models in black miniskirts.

SHEB WOOLEY
82, September 16, in Nashville, of leukemia. Actor and country singer best known for the 1958 number 1 hit "Purple People Eater," which sold 3 million copies. Wooley also acted, appearing in the Western *High Noon.*

JAMES "PHAT NASTY" DURANT
31, September 17, in New Orleans, of a seizure. Saxophonist with blues and jazz combos, most notably the contemporary New Orleans second-line jazz group Rebirth Brass Band.

Splash News (Osbourne), AP Wide World (house), Jim Cooper/AP Wide World (50 Cent), Charles Langella/Corbis Outline (Smith)

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Dear Superstar

YOU SEND QUESTIONS, WE GET ANSWERS. WHO LOVES YA, BABY?

John Mayer

Your questions for the guitar-pop heartthrob were personal (does he flirt with Justin Timberlake?), bizarre (is it OK to send him underwear?) and plain rude (why does he look so weird?). But he still answered them!

BY CLARK COLLIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS BUCK

"SO, WHERE'S THE monkey?" John Mayer asks *Blender*. "Don't you guys always take pictures of me with a monkey?"

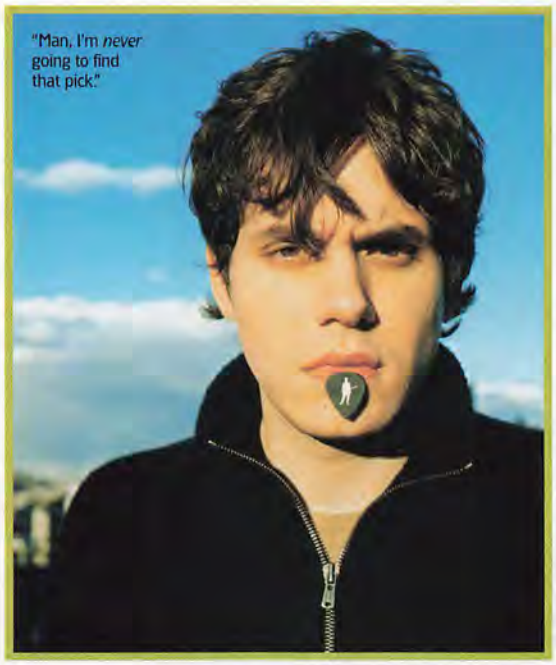
Well, yes — the last time we met up with the singer-songwriter, in the spring of 2002, we did indeed photograph him in the company of a chimpanzee named Apollo. Since then, however, a lot has changed. Mayer has become a bona fide superstar whose new album, *Heavier Things*, debuted at number 1. Apollo, meanwhile, has been sold to a cosmetics-testing facility. (We kid!)

But fame and fortune appear to have altered Mayer little, as he obliges our photographer by lasciviously slipping a hand down his jeans while mulling over his upcoming appearance on *Saturday Night Live*.

"Actually, I was a little nervous about doing the show," the 26-year-old says. "But I feel more relaxed now that I've actually been there and had the opportunity to smell stuff, touch stuff, lick stuff."

Which piece of *SNL* furniture, pray, received the attentions of the Mayer tongue?

"Oh, all of it," he replies. "Now, do you guys want a picture of my cameltoe? Or shall we just shove the camera down my ass?"



"Man, I'm *never* going to find that pick."

You're six-foot-three, definitely on the taller-than-you-think side of the pop spectrum. Is it, um, longer than we'd think as well?
THECASM, SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

Yeah, it's been three years. That's not what the questioner meant? That's my answer!

Have you ever sung your song "Come Back to Bed" to someone you wanted to come back to bed?
CLARKBAR, SAN CLEMENTE, CALIFORNIA

Never. Someday, though. Maybe it'll come in handy when I say something stupid.

You've dated both Jennifer Love Hewitt and Heidi Klum. Do you ever look at yourself in the mirror and think, "I am a god among men!"?
JUNE2783, NEW YORK

I actually have *not* dated both Jennifer Love Hewitt and Heidi Klum. I have had meals with Heidi Klum. What happens when you meet people you've seen only as beautiful or unobtainable is that you realize they're just people — and you run out of jerk-off fantasies. When you have more friends than jerk-off fantasies, you want to stop meeting people. But no, I don't look in a mirror and think that. Actually, I don't have mirrors in my house at all. I've got a fat head. A giant, fat head! I just assume that it's my, um, personality. And my three years!

A friend of mine went to the party Justin Timberlake threw after this year's VMAs, and he said you two were flirting. Any truth to this?
JAMESCON323, LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA

Could be. Maybe. There's a certain sexuality that some friends have, absolutely. I think sexuality has to exist between any two living things for those two living things to get along. You know, do Steven Tyler and Joe Perry flirt with each other? Absolutely. That's what makes things cool. But not, like, weiner-in-tush flirting. By the way, that's the extent of my vocabulary when it comes to working "blue."

Why do you look so weird when you sing? I don't mean to be rude, but I had to ask.
CMARTINFRIENDSTER, POTOMAC, MARYLAND

Uh . . . open parentheses, "Go fuck yourself," closed parentheses. The real answer? It's just the way it comes out. I agree it looks stupid, but I can't help what's going on. If I could, I'd change it to something much better. I just have to accept that that's the shape of my face that gets the notes out. I call my face the "note squeezer."

What's up with the tattoo on your arm? You have three squares, and only two of them are filled in. Why?
STIRTOES, SALT LAKE CITY

Somebody asked me that the other →

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["Do you guys want a picture of my cameltoe?"]

day. I told them it just fell off. Actually, I didn't realize when I got a tattoo on my forearm that I was going to engage in a conversation about that tattoo every time someone came up to me.

Women feel particularly noble and smart when they say to me, "Don't finish the third one — it's already done!" As if I needed some strange woman to tell me about the impermanence of life. The reason is that I like getting tattoos, but I don't like actually having a lot of tattoos. I like to keep it more flesh than ink. So the idea there is to fill it in a little bit at a time.

When was the last time that you lost your temper?
GOGOBRO, DULUTH, MINNESOTA

Years. The last time I got pissed off? Yesterday. But I hadn't been pissed off in a long time before yesterday. What did I get pissed off about? Feeling trapped in this job. Feeling helpless. But it all means that you end up eating better, you know what I mean?

It's funny — every time someone asks me when the last time I cried was, it's always the day after I cry. I didn't cry for two years before that. So I say, "Yesterday, but let me tell you about the time before." And they're not interested.

What was your nickname when you were in school?
CHOPPERZ, SYRACUSE, NEW YORK

I didn't have one. I always wanted one. I always wanted a nickname, and I always wanted to wear eyeglasses. I used to try to take eyeglasses from the lost-and-found, but they never fit me because my head was so big. I'd fake headaches for a while as a kid so I could go to the optometrist.

Did you ever want to be anything other than a musician?
PALEMOON, MEDFORD, OREGON

Yeah, and I'll give you them in order: Popeye. A fighter pilot. A radio DJ. An actor. And then I wanted to be a musician.

What was the first time you ever performed live like?
JOETRANSYLVANIA, RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

It was the most nerve-wracking experience of my life. It was even worse because I'd walked around with my chest out the week before talking about how great it was going to be. It was at this preteen talent

"And this dance I call 'The Terrible Groin Strain.'"

Jimi: So hot, even his shirt melted

Johnifer, July 1, 2003

show, and my fingers locked up, I was so nervous. It was kind of a kick in the nuts. I was going to whip out my guitar histrionics in front of everybody, and I really imploded emotionally. I cried afterward. I cried like a bitch. My mom had to pick me up. That was the worst.

"I cried afterward. I cried like a bitch. That was the worst." ★

Is it true that as a kid you used to go to school dressed as Jimi Hendrix?
IF6WAS9, PARAMUS, NEW JERSEY

Yeah — with, like, a big conch-shell belt and the hat and the silk shirt with all the jewelry like he had. Even *I* thought of myself as a schmuck by the end of the day.

Heidi Klum: "Seriously, what have you done with my clothes?"

Your parents are both teachers. Were they pissed off when you dropped out of college?
BIZZERL, COLUMBUS, OHIO

No, because by the time I went to college they were so over me making decisions they didn't agree with. There was just more "I told you so." I was the black sheep for the longest time.

You don't drink. Why not?
BARFPRO, LONG BEACH, NEW YORK

Because when I say I don't drink, most women gasp and go, "That is *sooo* cool!" But someone in my position has to stay really attuned to what works for you and what doesn't.

I did [drink] one time: I got really drunk outside my parents' house when they were home. I had about 20 shots of vodka, and it made me sicker than I've ever been in my life. My mom was there patting my back, and my dad was there like, "What's going on?" So I thought, "This is not for me." Also, I've seen enough *Behind the Music* to understand that all this can be taken away by Mr. Jack Daniel or Mr. Crown Royal.

Can I send you my underwear?
LITTLEMISSBROADWAY, LAS VEGAS

Yes, but don't send them to my managers' office, because they'll take them. Send them straight to me and mark them USED LAUNDRY. →

Joel Axelrad/Retna Ltd. (Hendrix); George Holz/Corbis Outline (Klum); Bauer-Griffin (Mayer and Hewitt)

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What's your favorite joke?
ESTHEREO, FORT WORTH, TEXAS

My favorite joke is so dirty I can't tell it to you. It would make the beginning of *Saving Private Ryan* look like fucking *Barney*. But I can tell you the punch line: "The answer is my son."

When you finally get the chance to run through the halls of your high school and scream at the top of your lungs, what will you say?
PULLEY0311, LONDON, ONTARIO

"This is just like the song!" And then I'll laugh.

What's your biggest fear?
TWIZTEDHYBRID

Anything to do with ghosts or possessions. That whole thing. Because an intruder has to break down your door. Ghosts and demons just slide under. Who's to say that they're not there? When I'm home alone at night, who's to say?

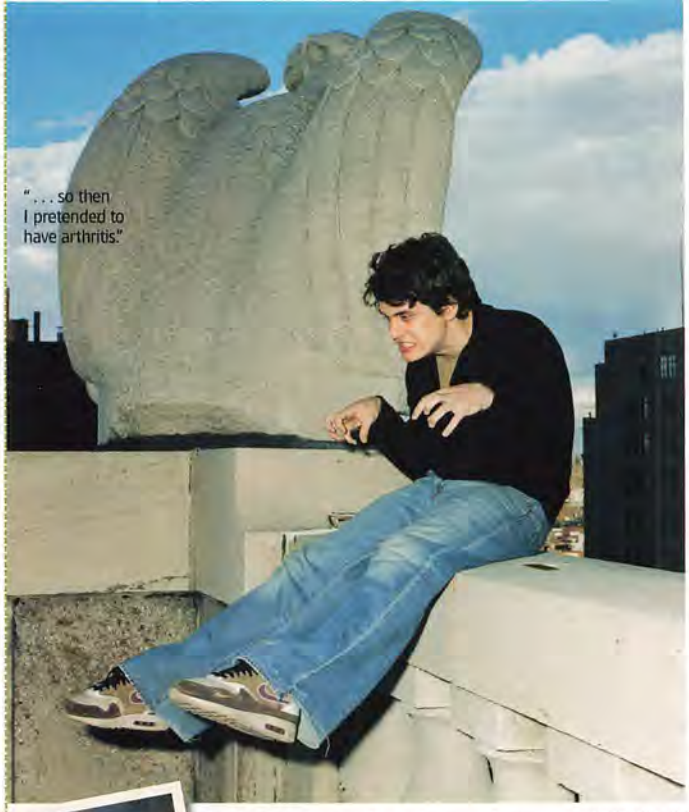
I think what I'm really talking about is insanity. Yeah, I'm going to make that my official answer: I'm scared of schizophrenia or multiple-personality [disorder]. I think that's the scariest thing in the world. I saw *A Beautiful Mind* and I was like, "I do not want to come down with that."

Your song "City Love" helped me get laid. Any other recommendations for get-laid-quick songs?
ISELLCRACK

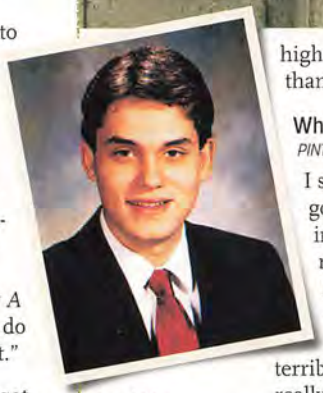
I tend to think that the way to get laid quicker is not to go the ballad route. But go to the lick-the-finger-and-touch-the-nipple sound. If I wanted to get laid right now, I wouldn't put on a slow song — I'd put on "Frontin'," by the Neptunes. Be different! Don't try to get her with the old sensitivo. She'll be waiting for that. What she's not waiting for is [*sings in falsetto*] "You got me workin', working, *baaaby!*"

You've traveled all over the country. What's the best town to party in?
PEDROTHEBEAR, DETROIT

L.A.'s pretty fun — it's really easy to get something going on. New York's good. Any place that inspires you to grab onto your full rock & roll potential and say, "Let's just get the top floor." Boston's a good place. Boston knows how to party. Boston was *born* on partying. Even a moment of revolution and strife was still a party — it was the Boston Tea Party. There was probably a lot more



"... so then I pretended to have arthritis."



As a high-school senior: How he's changed!

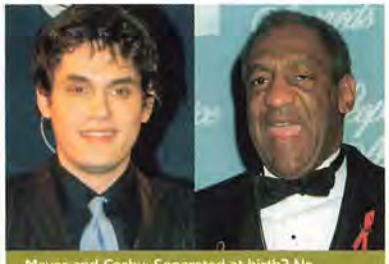
high-fiving actually going on there than is in the pictures.

What do you really suck at?
PINTOBOOM, AMES, IOWA

I suck at math. I'm not a very good listener, unless the topic interests me in the most intense way. I'm not really coordinated at sports. I'm a terrible drummer. I'm really bad at dancing. I can't see 3D pictures. I'm really bad at ... most things, actually. When you take all the things I'm bad at, it actually makes sense that I'd be really good at one thing.

"If I wanted to get laid, I'd put on the Neptunes." ★

Try hard-boiling that sucker.



Mayer and Cosby: Separated at birth? No.

"Your body is a wonderland ... row F, seat 37."

Which pop stars could you beat in a fight?
TULLER, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

I don't know. Are there any paraplegic pop bands out there? The Parkinson's Five?

Has anyone ever confused you with another celebrity?
BIGWIMP, MOBILE, ALABAMA

Not confused me full-on. But I do get Bill Cosby a lot.

Why is it that I'm always standing behind someone as tall as you are when I go to see a show?
RILLYKEWL, ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Because the world is holding something much cooler in store for you. Did I ever feel sorry for people standing behind me at shows? Yes. But I stopped feeling sorry about the same time as I started taking full-on loud dumps in public bathrooms.

Let me tell you something: When you find it in yourself to make poo with the same passion and dedication when other people are around as you do by yourself at home, it starts to mean so much more. You'll find extra confidence in other areas of your life. I've started saying, "This is me, this is the sound of me going." And if anybody has a problem with that, then, well, we're going to talk.

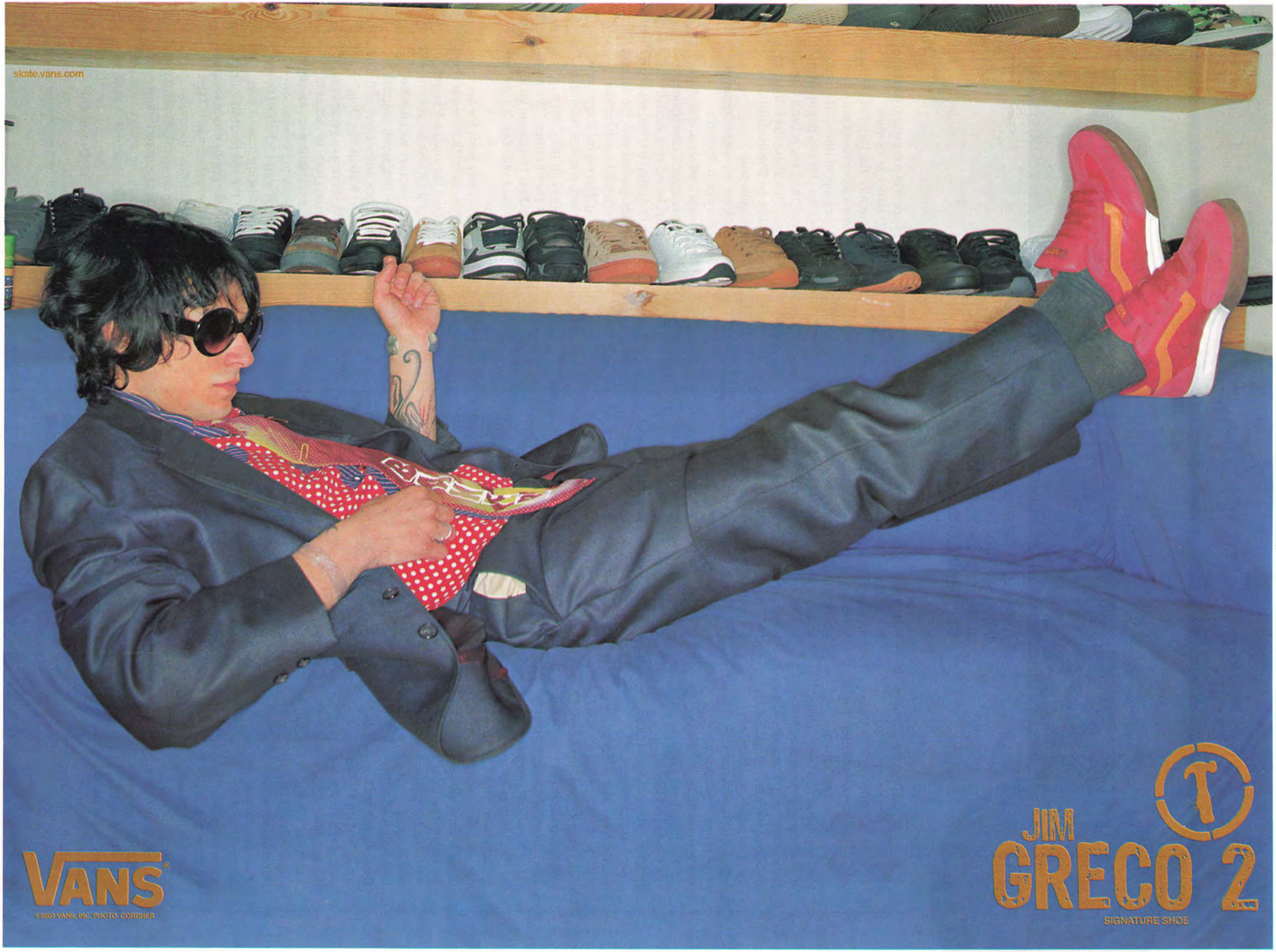
Do you read your own reviews? If so, what's the nastiest thing anyone's ever written about you?
RAJ500, NEWARK, DELAWARE

I have read reviews. The nastiest thing was that I was smarmy and pandering and insincere. You just chalk it up to the way it goes. Everything in my life has its place — I would rather have a guy who doesn't like me write a review in a creative way than have somebody come up to me and go, "You're John Mayer. You suck!" That would hurt 10 times worse.

What's the most extravagant rock-star purchase you've ever made?
KOOKOOKAJOOB, LONDON, ENGLAND

That Fabergé egg, maybe. [BLENDER]

Agence France Presse/Newscom (Fabergé egg); Classmates.com (Mayer in red tie); Dimitrios Kambouris/Wireimage.com (Mayer in blue tie); Paul Smith/Retna Ltd. (Cosby); Jason Squires/Wireimage.com (Mayer five)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SIGNATURE SHOE

Dream On

Their lead guitarist hated it, but this power ballad, recorded under the influence of massive quantities of cocaine, brought **Aerosmith** back from the brink of disaster

IT'S 1973. Aerosmith are about to be dropped by their record label. Their first album, *Aerosmith*, has just been released — to punishing commercial and critical apathy. "When we did get a review anywhere," singer Steven Tyler remembers, "the three words most often used were *primitive, derivative* and *redundant*."

Six months earlier, the future had looked much brighter. Following a 40-minute showcase of grubby blues at the legendary New York club Max's Kansas City, Columbia Records president Clive Davis had signed the band, telling Tyler, "You're going to be a big star." Now Davis wasn't so sure.

Deciding to cut his losses, he told the band there would be no second album. As a desperate final measure, the group's comanager Steven Leber pleaded with Davis to release the track "Dream On" as a single. It stopped the ax from falling, and it has been responsible for more burned lighter fuel than any song in history. It is not just a power ballad. It is *the* power ballad.

Fond of booze, arguing and drugs — though not yet at the legendary levels that would soon follow — the band gathered to write songs for their first album in their hometown of Boston. At the insistence of Aerosmith co-manager Frank Connelly, they stayed in a house together in nearby Boxboro so they could concentrate on the job at hand.

Sitting at a piano in the basement, Tyler picked out the melody to "Dream On," a tune he had been fooling around with for six years. Guitarist Joe Perry started playing the right-hand part, with Tom Hamilton adding bass.

"I was so sure of this song, so sure it could really work for us," Tyler says. In 1966 — at age 18 — the singer had already had a small taste of success after cutting a single, "The Sun," with his previous band, the Chain Reaction. That group had amounted to nothing, and Tyler was aware that Aerosmith could be his last chance at stardom. Consequently, the lyrics of "Dream On" were a bittersweet reflection on the passage of time. "This song sums up the shit you put up with when you're in a new band," he explains. "It's about the hunger to be somebody: Dream until your dreams come true."

Steven Tyler: "Right foot in front of the left, you say?"

VITAL STATISTICS

Song
"Dream On"

Artist
Aerosmith

Label
Columbia

Performers
Steven Tyler *lead vocals, piano, Mellotron*
Joe Perry *lead guitar*
Tom Hamilton *bass*
Joey Kramer *drums*
Brad Whitford *rhythm guitar*

Producer
Adrian Barber

Released
June 1973

Rereleased
December 1975

Weeks on Chart
29

Highest Chart Position
6

Work on *Aerosmith* began in October 1972 at Boston's Intermedia Studios. Columbia Records and band comanager David Krebs selected British producer Adrian Barber, who had previously worked with the Allman Brothers Band, to oversee the recording. His no-frills approach was met with a mixed reception.

"It was so simple," says drummer Joey Kramer. "We played our songs live. If we were good, Adrian would yell 'Yes! It's got the bloody fire!' "

"Adrian was great for his time," Tyler says, "but we got very little help in the studio. I'm not sure whether it was because he was so high or because we all were."

Comprising seven original compositions and a cover of Rufus Thomas's "Walkin' the Dog," *Aerosmith* remains a promising, if rudimentary, taste of things to come. The sessions were an edgy experience for the studio newcomers and weren't helped by the band's escalating cocaine use. Whenever the red recording light came on, the group would freeze, a situation remedied when Tyler simply unscrewed the bulb.

Putting down his vocals, Tyler suffered a crisis of confidence and resorted to an unnatural, strangled pitch in order to sound "a little bit black." "I used this voice for all of that stuff except 'Dream On,' " he says. " 'Dream On' is the real me." Tyler added flute and strings using

Alphonse Telymonde (still-lifes, 2); CVLFI (Tyler, top); Bob Gruen/Starfile (Tyler, bottom)

["I didn't like it." JOE PERRY, AEROSMITH]

a Mellotron — while sky-high on crystal THC — and "Dream On" was complete.

Aerosmith was released in January 1973. The band's management blamed its failure on the label's marketing department, which was aggressively pushing Bruce Springsteen's *Greetings From Asbury Park, N.J.* "For every dollar they put into Aerosmith, they put 100 into Springsteen," Krebs claims. After Leber's bargaining with Clive Davis, "Dream On" was released as a single and crept to number 59 on the *Billboard* chart. It was a small victory, and Columbia did allow the band to make a second album, *Get Your Wings*, the following year. They hit the road again and eventually got some payback with the hit album *Toys in the Attic* in 1975. Capitalizing on Aerosmith's snowballing success, the label rereleased "Dream On," which hit number 6 in 1976. Not everyone was happy, though.

"I didn't like 'Dream On' and hated my playing on it," says guitarist Joe Perry. "We were a hard-rock band, and now we were going to owe our reputation to a slow song. You had to get your songs on the radio, and the only way a band like us was able to do that was by having a ballad. We're still playing the same games."

Perry's ex-wife, Elissa Jerrett, is characteristically less diplomatic about the track: "I hated this song so much. It became my bathroom song. They'd start playing it at the shows, and I'd go to the bathroom."

But "Dream On" has its fans, too. Ronnie James Dio and the Mission, U.K. have covered it, while the opening bars of No Doubt's "Don't Speak" are clearly an homage to the Aerosmith standard. However, just as Run-DMC's "Walk This Way" revitalized Aerosmith's career in 1986, hip-hop has brought "Dream On" a new audience, with Eminem's sampling of Tyler's vocals — Perry rerecorded his guitar part — on 2002's "Sing for the Moment."

"I had wanted to do it when I was, like, 16 or 17," Eminem says. "The chorus fit what I was going through at the time, so we just constructed the beat. Seventies rock had a feel to it — it was crazy."

Even Perry can now manage to be upbeat about the track that saved Aerosmith, albeit when discussing its treatment at the hands of Eminem. "It's great," the guitarist says. "The song lives again in another form." *BEN MITCHELL*

WHO'S WHO >>>

STEVEN TYLER
Willful Aerosmith singer. Often compared to Mick Jagger, much to his chagrin. He took a lot of drugs. He's clean now.

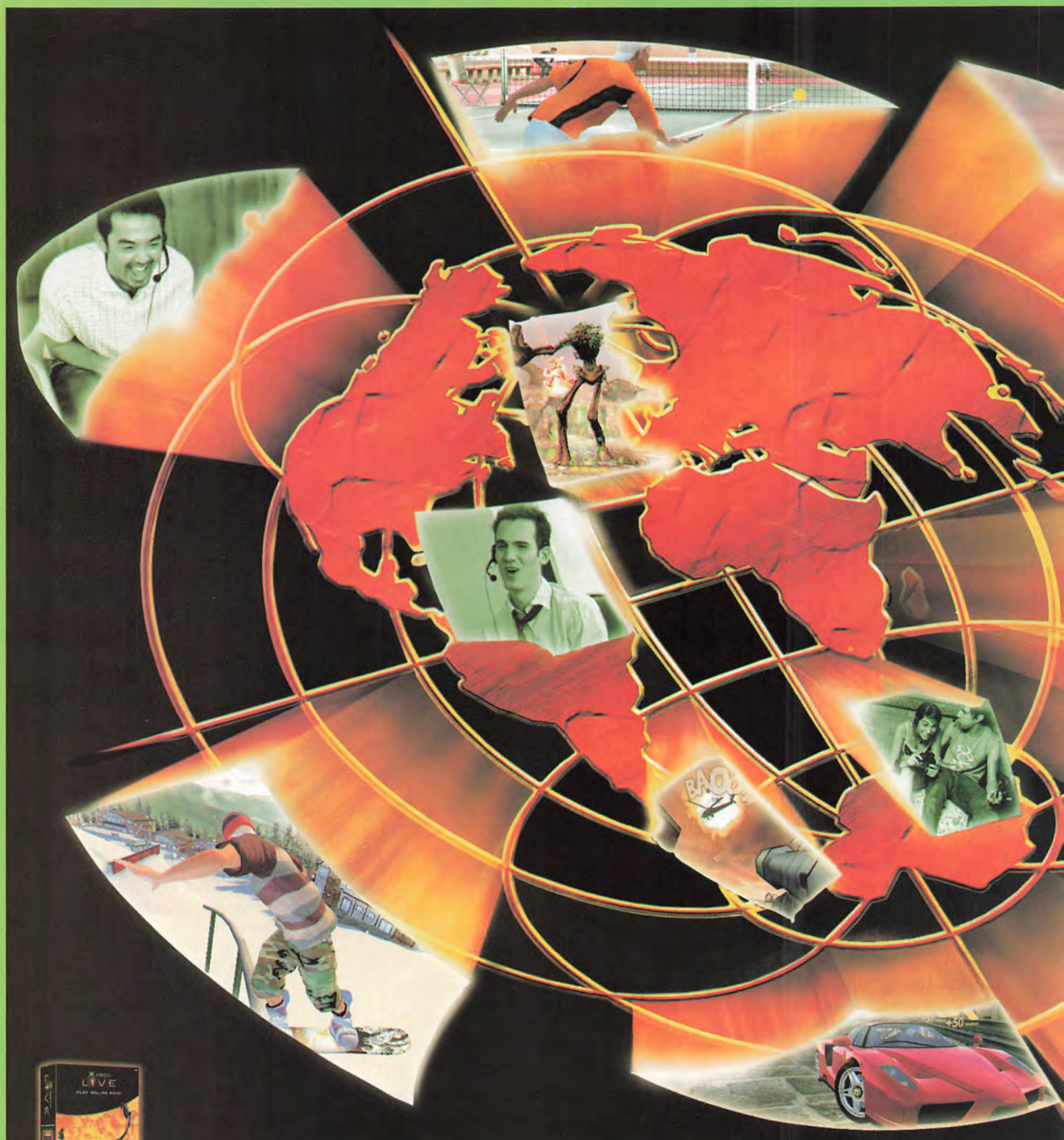
JOE PERRY
Willful Aerosmith lead guitarist. Left the band in 1979 but came back to it five years later. He took a lot of drugs. He's clean now.

JOEY KRAMER
Willful Aerosmith drummer and graduate of the Berklee College of Music. He came up with the band's name.

ADRIAN BARBER
British producer. Worked as an engineer for Cream, the Velvet Underground, the Allman Brothers and Vanilla Fudge.

CLIVE DAVIS
Legendary music executive responsible for discovering Aerosmith, Whitney Houston and Alicia Keys. Now runs his own J Records.

Fin Costello/Redferns/Retna Ltd. (Aerosmith); CVLFI (Tyler); Bob Gruen/Starlic (Perry, Kramer); Roger Ressmeyer/Corbis (Davis)



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Ask Blender

SOLVING YOUR POP CONUNDRUMS SINCE 2001

Beatles bootleg: All expense spared.

I heard John Lennon recorded with Paul McCartney in 1974. Is this true? Why haven't we heard about it?

NICK WALLIS, HAYWARD, CALIFORNIA

The session happened, but don't get too excited. That March, McCartney visited Lennon during his "lost weekend" in L.A., partly to pass on word that Yoko Ono was willing to take her estranged husband back. A superstar jam session resulted, with Lennon on guitar, McCartney on drums, Stevie Wonder on keyboards and Harry Nilsson on backing vocals.

The 30-minute bootleg of the event, *A Toot and a Snore in '74*, reveals that nothing remotely artistic took place, unless you count shambolic versions of "Stand by Me" and "Lucille" interrupted by Lennon shouting about the equipment not working. The highlight is Lennon asking Wonder, "Do you want a snort, Steve? A toot? It's going 'round. . . ." By the way, unlike everyone else, Wonder was in good form that day — toot or no toot!

My friend tried to tell me that DMX, Ja Rule and Jay-Z once had a group together. Is he full of it?

ALAN DELAMORA, BOSTON

Your friend's not entirely wrong. Back in 1998, industry mogul Irv Gotti tried to get the three rap giants together in an East Coast supergroup, the Murderers.

However, the sessions never gelled, and the tag was taken for the Murder Inc. stable's 2000 compilation *Irv Gotti Presents . . . The Murderers* (showcasing Ja Rule, with cameos from Jay-Z and DMX). These days, of course, Ja Rule and DMX don't get along. Responding to X's claims that he's a copycat, Ja sniped, "Bitch dog, get at me dog/You always been a pup!" To paraphrase *Hart to Hart:* When they met, it was almost murder.

Ja Rule (left) and DMX: "Hey, didn't *you* bring the shirts?"

I'm a big Incubus fan, and I've always wondered: Who is that guy they put on their album covers?

JEFF YOUNG, LUBBOCK, TEXAS

The identity of the cheesy mustache guy (known as "Chuck" or "Charles Mulholland") on such Incubus albums as *S.C.I.E.N.C.E.* has long been a riddle that has gotten fans in a lather. Among the rumors circulating are that he's a high-school teacher or a cult leader. Adding to the confusion, the band has said both that they don't know him and that he's a '70s porn star.

All of this ignores the fact that former Incubus member DJ Lyfe gave the man away on an Internet posting: He's lead singer Brandon Boyd's actor-model dad, Chuck Boyd, who has appeared in a few films, including *Predator 2*, and a 1975 episode of *Starsky & Hutch*. "I think he was like the Marlboro man, but for Winston," DJ Lyfe wrote. "He's a cool guy, and he calls Brandon 'Brandy.' " Mystery solved.

"Hi, kids, I'm Brandon Boyd's dad."

Little Richard orders up four beatings for his hairstylist.

Pat Boone: He's *craaazy!*

What were the original lyrics to Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti"? I heard they were really dirty.

JEFF STERN, BUFFALO, NEW YORK

You heard right. Presumably, when Pat Boone covered "Tutti Frutti" in 1956, he didn't know the song started life as a naughty celebration of sex. Little Richard Penniman (who was thrown out of his home at age 13 for blatant homosexuality) could never be called demure, but even he didn't think this self-composed novelty tune, which he played to enliven raunchy club crowds, was fit for general consumption. After all, the original lyrics went: "Tutti frutti, good booty/If it don't fit, don't force it/You can grease it, make it easy!"

Producer Robert "Bumps" Blackwell disagreed and persuaded Little Richard that the song would be his first hit — though he also had to persuade another songwriter, Dorothy LaBostrie, to write new "booty-free" lyrics.

Were Trent Reznor and Tori Amos ever romantically involved?

PSYCHO C, NATICK, MASSACHUSETTS

Neither will say for sure, but the pair *were* very close circa 1994: He guested on her song "Past the Mission"; she nicknamed him "Stimpy." Ever since, conspirators have looked for hidden connections between them. Amos's *Little Earthquakes* liner notes include the words *nine inch nails* for no apparent reason; her song "Caught a Lite Sneeze" includes the phrase *pretty hate machine.*

But the most intriguing piece of evidence comes from a comment Amos made onstage in July 1994: "That tongue! If [Reznor] became a eunuch, it wouldn't even matter!" [BLENDER]

YOUR QUESTIONS >>

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Please include your first and last name, your hometown and your state or province. Cool!

Mr. Snuggles (still-life): Hulton Archive (Little Richard); Bettmann/Corbis (Boone); Neal Preston/Corbis (Reznor); Monique Bunn/Retna Ltd. (Ja Rule and DMX)

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Who says **Ryan Adams** is "bizarre," "manic" and "weird"? He does. *Blender* goes bar-hopping with the hard-partying king of controversy and finds he wants to destroy the music that made his name . . .

SMASH IT UP!

BY ROB TANNENBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KENNETH CAPPELLO

RYAN ADAMS doesn't have any use for notepads. When he gets an idea, or wants to start a shopping list, he just scribbles on the wall of his expensive New York apartment. In the bathroom, near the light switch, he has scrawled a few important reminders: BUY TOWELS. BUY NEW SHOWER CURTAIN.

Adams is spontaneous and impetuous, the way rock stars used to be, and the fact that he's not yet a rock star hasn't impeded him from acting like Keith Richards's Southern nephew. He feuds with fellow musicians (he once called Jack White a "fucking ponce"), smokes too much, doesn't comb his hair and likes booze and drugs. He's also one of the most inspiring songwriters and exciting live performers of the last 10 years, with a talent that particularly impresses rock's elite.

Last year, the Rolling Stones picked Adams to open some shows, though he turned down the chance to keep touring with them ("Who wants to open for his idols? That's way too fucking hard," he says with a shrug). He talks regularly with Elton John, whom he fondly refers to as "perverted Uncle Elton." And Steve Earle tells *Blender* that Adams is "the best singer the alternative-country scene has produced, period."

Adams, 29, lives in a duplex (he once called it a "2 million dollar corner apartment" on his Web site) inside a beaux-arts downtown landmark built by J.P. Morgan and formerly used as a tuberculosis unit, insane asylum and narcotic detox center; two of the Strokes share an apartment a few floors away.

Like a bachelor schoolboy, Adams has decorated his place to resemble a kind of artsy thrift store, simulating the bursting insides of his excitable mind: a Confederate flag hanging on the wall, some crosses, a Smiths LP lying next to a Rimbaud collection, a still-warm bong leaning up against a Smith-Corona typewriter, a skateboard he uses to get around the city, an expensive rug he bought but now regrets.

For his sentimental breakup ballads and brooding steel-guitar passages, as well as his romances with actresses (Winona Ryder, Carrie Hamilton) and singers (Beth Orton; his most recent ex, Leona Naess), Adams earned the title of "alt-country heartthrob." But his new and best album, *Rock N Roll*, is an excited, stimulated blast of punk rasp and tuff-rock grooves — from the first single, "So Alive," which rings like early U2, to the dismissive kiss-off "Burning Photographs" to the Nirvana-style disaster-pounder "Note to Self: Don't Die." The culmination of Adams's promise, the record should finally defenestrate the alt-country tag.

"I don't really feel like that right now," he says, shrugging again. "I mean, if you put enough whiskey in anybody, they can make an alt-country record."

His focused turn in musical style coincides with changes in his state of mind as well. "I've certainly been unhappy in stretches of my twenties, but I don't know anyone who wasn't. I've learned not to celebrate the darkness so much." Partly, this is due to a new relationship, with actress Parker Posey, a Mississippian and the belle of such indie films as *A Mighty Wind* and *Best in Show*, whom he met while he was starting to record *Rock N Roll*.

↑Tongue action: Adams with Parker Posey (above) and ex-flame Leona Naess

To combat the darkness, Adams explains, "I'm sort of planting Post-it notes all over my psyche."

What do these mental reminders say? "Do not skateboard wasted. Do not buy $10,000 rugs. Be careful what you say to journalists." He laughs, and adds one more: "You don't have to stay up until 7 A.M. — tomorrow is a new day."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ADAMS WRITES SONGS about infatuation and desolation, the extreme edges of emotion that leave him either celebrating like a Little Leaguer ("I'm spinning 'round the room in awe," goes one new lyric) or drunk, ruined and cruel. True to his songs, he's a bit of a drama queen — either high as a god or low as a suicide. "He'll sink until just before he can't breathe, and then he's able to pull himself out of the quicksand," says Johnny T. Yerrington, a.k.a. Johnny T., his drummer, friend and late-night partying partner.

Adams summed up his vision on the first song of *Heartbreaker*, his "really sad" 2000 album: "To Be Young (Is to Be Sad, Is to Be High)." He's a mercurial, heart-on-his-sleeve motormouth, and his audacity gives him a boyish air, like Dennis the Menace in a faded Western shirt.

"Rock music is Ryan's religion, and he's a true believer," according to James Barber, Courtney Love's longtime boyfriend, who produced *Rock N Roll*. "He's so willing to give himself over to what he sees as the cause."

David Ryan Adams's consecration in music began in Jacksonville, North Carolina, a small town with lots of car dealerships. After school, he'd come home, smoke pot and listen to Slayer's *Reign in Blood* or *Sister*, by Sonic Youth. "It sounded like drugs to me," he says. "I thought, 'I will spend my entire life trying to figure this record out.' "

In a town where most kids dressed like surfers, writing Black Flag's name in Magic Marker on his Converse sneakers made Adams a weirdo: "Still am one. Fucking weird all over the place." When everyone in school went to local football games, Adams would sit in the stands and "daydream about accidentally making out with a cheerleader."

He took his identity from a passion for punk rock, and his grandmother bought him subscriptions to such zines as *Flipside* and *Maximum Rocknroll*. His parents divorced when he was 9, and Ryan, the second of three kids, was raised by his mother, a teacher. "If you think I'm weird, you gotta meet her," he says. "My mom is like a psychedelic game show. You don't know what you're going to win, you don't really know what the point of the game is, you just play."

His father, who built houses, ran a taxidermy shop and owned a bar, lived outside of town; Adams talks to him only "once in a while" and turns jittery when asked about him: "I'm crawling out of my skin, because you're hitting on some shit I don't want to talk about."

When his mother went back to school, Adams lived with his grandparents, who didn't allow him to curse but also never realized when he was stoned. Overall, he says, "I was let free to roam." At age 16, he dropped out of school, moved to Raleigh, got his own apartment and sang in a punk band, the Patty Duke Syndrome.

He played in several bands at the same time — one was the jacked-up →

From top: Theo Wargo/Wireimage.com; AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill

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country band Whiskeytown, which had a fiddle but still covered Iggy Pop's punk anthem "I Wanna Be Your Dog." Adams told everyone in Raleigh that Whiskeytown would be huge.

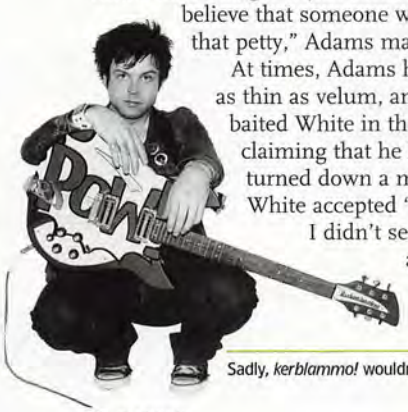
Starting with a 1995 debut EP, records and tours brought Whiskeytown lots of attention, most of it focused on lead singer Adams, who trashed a stage one night in San Francisco, apparently enraged over the club's no-smoking policy. Whiskeytown seemed to rotate members as though they were soldiers; shortly after the release of their first major-label album, 1997's *Strangers Almanac*, three of the five members left. Violinist Caitlin Cary, the only one who stayed for the duration, said Adams was "hard to deal with, and he knows it." Whiskeytown never got huge, though they seem to have left three myths as their legacy: that Adams was a great if inconsistent writer, a charming performer and a huge asshole.

His latest ex, Leona Naess, has been selling T-shirts on her Web site that read MY X IS A WANKER. Could that be a swipe at Adams? The shirt, Naess tells *Blender* diplomatically, "is about all the ex-boyfriends in my life. It is not about any one person."

"I get as much bad press as anybody can get," Adams says. "I am *the* accumulator of negative press. I'm from the South, I liked punk rock and it was inherent that I was just going to raise hell. But it's not like I fight people in bars, or stab people."

Adams enflamed his reputation last year when he quarreled with rock's prince of cool, Jack White. Adams was a White Stripes fan; two years ago, in the credits to *Gold*, a Grammy-nominated record he wrote while "really sad, profoundly lonely," he even thanked Meg White "for saving rock n' roll."

On tour last year, Adams played White Stripes songs and provocatively changed the lyrics to "Dead Leaves and the Dirty Ground" ("Meg White, you do me all right"). Jack White heard about it and confronted Adams in a bar in New York's East Village. "I just couldn't believe that someone would be that petty," Adams marvels. At times, Adams has skin as thin as velum, and he baited White in the press, claiming that he had turned down a movie role White accepted "because I didn't see 'acting' anywhere on my job →



Sadly, *kerblammo!* wouldn't fit.

RIP! MIX! BURN! >>>

Now you can put all of Ryan Adams's greatest musical moments on one CD!

1 "DRANK LIKE A RIVER"
FAITHLESS STREET
MOOD FOOD, 1996
Small-town alcoholism and lonely death, as seen through the eyes of Adams's alt-country band Whiskeytown.
BEST MOMENT Adams serves notice of his bleak take on the mating game: "Somebody wrecked his life, and I'll bet you it was his darlin'." (0:30)

2 "THIS IS IT"
ROCK N ROLL
LOST HIGHWAY, 2003
Gloriously energized radio rock, and a love song to new gal-pal Parker Posey.
BEST MOMENT The third chorus, where Adams sounds as though he might explode from the drama of it all. (2:42)

3 "GOODNIGHT, HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD"
GOLD
LOST HIGHWAY, 2001
A tribute to the only bar left in Los Angeles that will tolerate smoking.
BEST MOMENT Adams blearily calls time on yet another night: "It's happening, baby; they're putting up the chairs." (0:01)

4 "TO BE YOUNG (IS TO BE SAD, IS TO BE HIGH)"
HEARTBREAKER
BLOODSHOT, 2000
The first song on Adams's solo debut, and a neat encapsulation of his talents: Who else could switch so assuredly from rockabilly abandon to a touchingly tender glimpse of teenage dysfunction?
BEST MOMENT The seamless high-to-sad transition. (2:04)

5 "YESTERDAY'S NEWS"
STRANGERS ALMANAC
OUTPOST, 1997
From Whiskeytown's third album, an inspired fusion of punk-rock energy and Bruce Springsteen circa *Born to Run*.
BEST MOMENT A truly cutting announcement: "I can't stand to be under your wing," Adams blurts. (0:27)

6 "MY WINDING WHEEL"
HEARTBREAKER
BLOODSHOT, 2000
He's arguing with his girl again, adopting the pose of the slouching romantic desperado.
BEST MOMENT Casting an insouciant look, he sings, "Buy a pretty dress/Wear it out tonight/For anyone you think could outdo me." (0:41)

7 "NEW YORK, NEW YORK"
GOLD
LOST HIGHWAY, 2001
His closest song to a hit so far, transformed by 9/11 from a fond look back at a past relationship to a celebration of Manhattan's neon glimmer.
BEST MOMENT Strangely, the sax solo, which beautifully conjures the city. (3:01)

8 "COME PICK ME UP"
HEARTBREAKER
BLOODSHOT, 2000
Heartbreaker's standout track, and possibly the most cynical love song ever written. So how come it sounds so impossibly romantic?
BEST MOMENT His helpless plea to yet another female: "Come pick me up/Take me out/Fuck me up/Steal my records/Screw all my friends." (1:20)

9 "BURNING PHOTOGRAPHS"
ROCK N ROLL
LOST HIGHWAY, 2003
The perfect soundtrack to the evening after you've become single again.
BEST MOMENT His croakiest summation of his latest relationship's key flaw: "I used to be sad; now I'm just bored with you." (3:03)

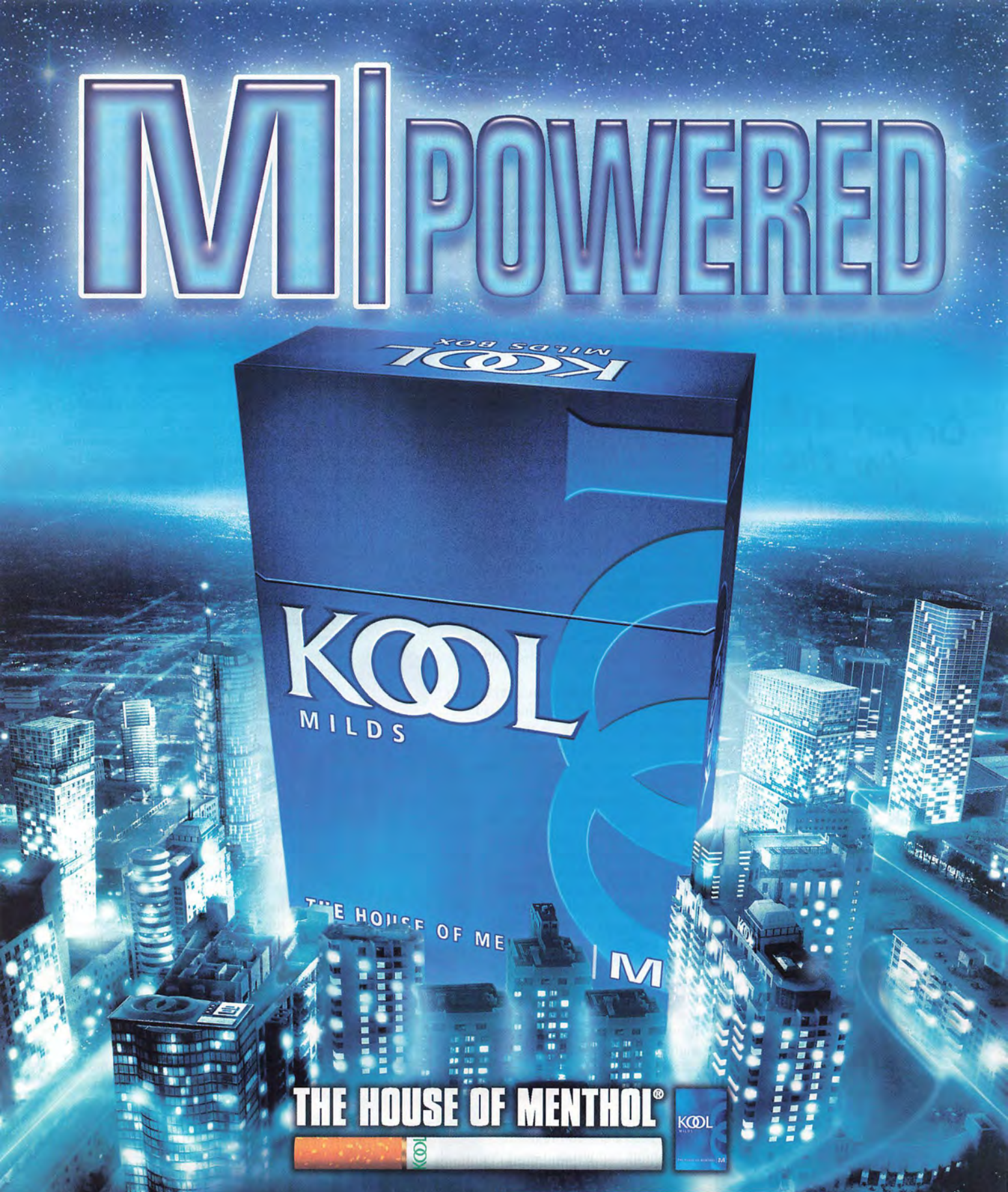
10 "NOBODY GIRL"
GOLD
LOST HIGHWAY, 2001
Nine minutes–plus of post-relationship spite, in which tension builds up to a sneering chorus.
BEST MOMENT The climactic, decisive put-down: "You're nobody, girl." (3:32)

11 "CRY ON DEMAND"
DEMOLITION
LOST HIGHWAY, 2002
A characteristically bleak glimpse of — guess what? — love gone sour, off last year's remnants CD.
BEST MOMENT The mask suddenly drops, and Adams delivers the killer line: "The truth is, I miss you." (1:01)

12 "NOTE TO SELF: DON'T DIE"
ROCK N ROLL
LOST HIGHWAY, 2003
A filthy-sounding Nirvana homage about self-loathing and bleary-eyed determination. Drugs may be involved.
BEST MOMENT His heart-stoppingly Cobain-esque moan: "Note to self: Don't change for anyone/Note to self: Don't die." (0:41) *JOHN HARRIS*

Whiskeytown: "You're supposed to be pushing!"

Clockwise from top: Alphonse Telymonde (still-life); Marina Chavez/Interscope; Kenneth Cappello



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application to be a rock fucking star."

"I don't consider that trouble," Adams says now. "It's OK to make a little fun. I have a big mouth, I guess. If someone treads on my thing, I retaliate."

Those are hardly words of contrition. But a few seconds later, he dismisses the subject. "I don't want to talk about it — I'll just get in more trouble."

So *Blender* asks about the high-romantic streak that runs through his records. "A lot of rock songs seem to be like a warning: 'I'm tough; watch your back.' That's not interesting to me. When I write, I try to think of something angry and beautiful, or sad and romantic.

"I'm a little bizarre about my emotions," he continues. "I'm manic — I overthink, overdo, overanalyze. Why else would I write songs all the time?" He grins mischievously. "I could be covering the White Stripes." Adams, despite his intentions, gravitates to trouble: "I don't know how to bite my tongue."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ADAMS IS A provocateur, but he's also a charming, almost courtly Southern gentleman, as vulnerable as he is arrogant, and as ingratiating as a con man. A few days after our first meeting, he invites *Blender* to dinner at Parker Posey's new home in the East Village, requesting that we bring two bottles of champagne.

Posey and a half-dozen artsy friends prepare a dinner of steak and salad, eaten informally because she hasn't yet bought any knives. He calls her "Parks" and teases her about being six years older than he is; they share cigarettes and wrestle on the bed like puppies. He does the dishes. As she passes by, he looks longingly at her and whistles lustily: "I could keep knocking that thing out for years." She even sings on *Rock N Roll* and has a cowriting credit on "Note to Self: Don't Die."

Mutual friends had told Adams and Posey they should meet. "You guys would get along; you're both nutty," one said. When he was working in a studio one night this year, she showed up with some friends. He thought she was "really animated and funny as hell," and soon, they had created a shared life of "late nights and weird parties."

"Do you smoke pot?" Posey asks, offering *Blender* a ceramic bong she made herself. Most of the party moves to the roof, while Adams and Johnny T. sit on the floor, playing their own music at jet-airplane volume.

With Elton John:
"You're the best."
"No, *you're* the best."

Earlier in the year, Adams made a "really dark, depressing" record, *Love Is Hell*, which will be released this winter in two parts. Then he started going to Motherfucker, an occasional downtown party Johnny T. copromotes, and he rediscovered New Order, Joy Division, Generation X and lots of other British post-punk dance music: "Then the writing changed." His label, Lost Highway, "was pretty excited" by the new sound, he reports. "I didn't sound like I wanted to die. After *Love Is Hell*, anything would be a relief."

The group moves to one bar, then quickly to another. Adams sings often about booze and drugs and the haze they cause, and on the cover of *Rock N Roll*, he makes a reference to his reputation as a wastrel by turning the first letter of his name into *Rx*, the symbol for a medical prescription.

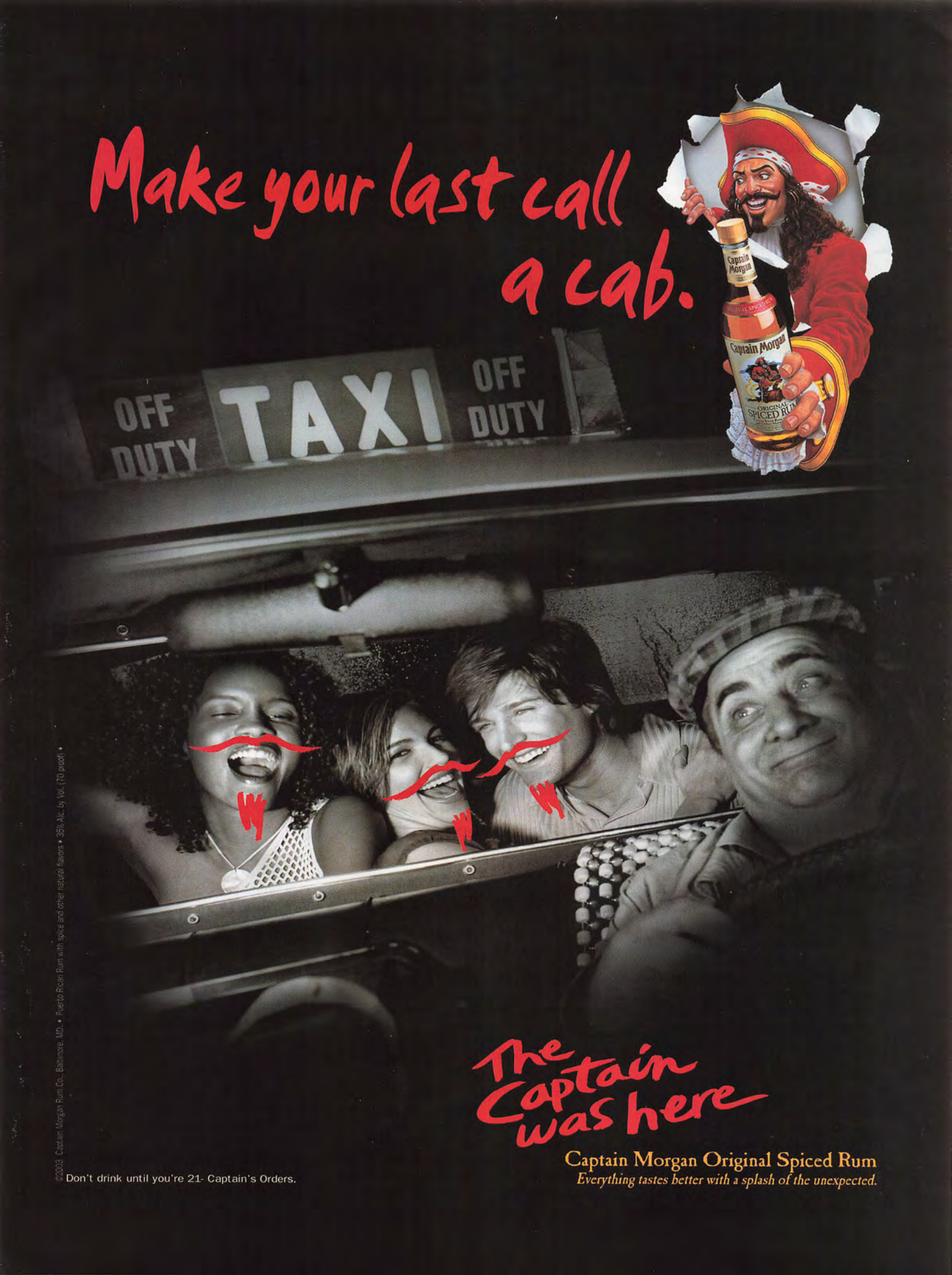
"To break up the tedium, you go out and have a cocktail," he says. "But I've never woken up surrounded by empty liquor bottles with blood coming out of my mouth in a hotel with a girl I don't know. I've experimented with drugs. But I don't shoot up. Not many people make it through that."

As some friends head home, he and Johnny T. head down to a tiny, stuffy basement room where they drunkenly record ridiculous demos late at night. "We get greasy and play like Yes or Rush, but really bad." He listens back to some recordings in the musty darkness, laughing at the ridiculousness.

"I've never woken up surrounded by empty liquor bottles with blood coming out of my mouth."

The next day, Adams misses a photo session for *Blender*. He's "not feeling well," his publicist tells us. Which is surprising, because we'd last seen him at 2 A.M. that night, drinking champagne from the bottle, and he looked pretty healthy. It seems Adams forgot to check his own Post-it notes. [BLENDER]

From top: Rick Diamond/CMT; Kenneth Cappello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"What a Beautiful Ass!"

A TEST OF HUMAN NATURE!

When British retro-metallers **the Darkness** asked to spend a bunch of *Blender*'s money on a donkey, we naturally assumed they were joking . . .

BY CLARK COLLIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHIL KNOTT

The Darkness, from left: Ed Graham, Dan Hawkins, Justin Hawkins, Frankie Poullain

"THANKS FOR THE donkey!" says Darkness lead singer Justin Hawkins with a grin, gulping on his Budweiser in the *Blender* office. "And it's not often you get to say that!"

No indeed. Nor is it every day that *Blender*'s twenty-second-floor headquarters plays host to a large, furry quadruped. This is one of those days, however, thanks to the British falsetto-metallers — who, when asked how they would like to spend $848 of our cash, sent word that they wanted to crash one of New York Fashion Week's catwalk shows . . . with a donkey!

The news had initially caused much head-scratching, donkeys being none too easy to locate in Manhattan. But then we contacted Animals for Advertising, a firm that specializes in just such odd requests (they provided a lucky snake to Britney Spears for the 2001 MTV Video Music Awards). So it comes to pass that, just after 6 this particular afternoon, work on the Ultimate Music Magazine grinds to a halt with the appearance of a seven-month-old Sicilian miniature donkey named Georgia and her owner, Tucker Hartshorne. Not just absurdly cute, Georgia is also something of a music fan, Hartshorne assures us.

"I play bluegrass on my banjo, and she likes that," he drawls. "Cows are known to make more milk if you play them country music. It relaxes them."

By the time the Darkness turn up an hour later, Georgia appears completely relaxed, perhaps even bored. She is certainly unworried by the band's appearance despite their copious bandannas, tattoos and facial hair.

"Ah, she's lovely," coos Hawkins, 28, stroking Georgia's flanks.

"Yeah, what a beautiful ass," deadpans Hawkins's younger brother, 26-year-old guitarist Dan.

"Originally we were talking about doing midget jousting with donkeys," Justin recalls. "But then we thought, 'Hey, it's Fashion Week — let's take a really unglamorous creature to that' and demonstrate that even a donkey can be the new black, as it were."

"We were expecting a big nag, though," adds bassist Frankie Poullain, 32. "She's very cute."

"We're a bit like a donkey, aren't we?" Dan conjectures. "We never fail to amuse — and we're quite hairy."

Actually, the story of the Darkness more calls to mind a mule. A throwback to the days when playing guitar solos atop a roadie's shoulders was not so much expected as demanded by law, the band toiled away in unfashionable obscurity for three years before finally hitting paydirt with their debut, *Permission to Land*. It's an album that as we speak is celebrating its third week in pole position atop the British charts.

"Is America ready for the Darkness?" Dan muses. "Everywhere else is, you know. It ain't rocket science, what we do. Now, where exactly are we going to plant the tree?"

Ah, yes, the tree. The Darkness's one non-donkey-related request was to plant a tree in our office. Sadly, although it was easy to get a nice-looking 10-foot-tall ficus, there aren't many places in the crowded *Blender* workspace suitable for reforestation.

"What about that office over there?" Justin asks.

Ah, well, that belongs to our publisher. Our has-the-power-to-fire-everyone's-ass-if-we-fuck-with-his-office publisher.

"Nah, he won't mind," Justin asserts. "We're the motherfucking Darkness!"

It has to be said that the motherfucking Darkness do a very nice job of repotting the tree, even if most of the work is left to 26-year-old drummer Ed Graham while the rest of us compete for the title of World's Worst Pun Merchant: "It's tree-mendous!" "Leaf it alone." "Your humor's really branching out."

Enough! We have bigger fish to fry, or, rather, donkeys to lead through New York. And so the Darkness escort our four-legged friend out the front door and hoof it one block north to the Bryant Park Fashion Week Pavilion, where at this very moment designer Anna Sui is showing off her new spring collection.

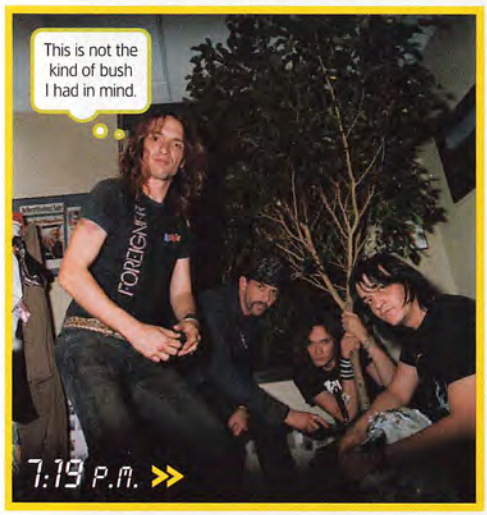
SPEND OUR CASH!

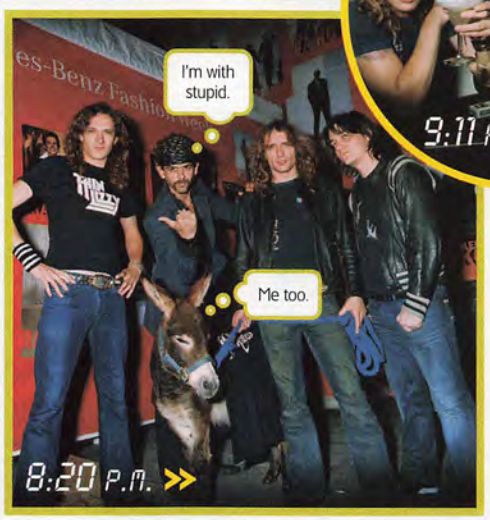
THE BAND
The Darkness

THE MISSION
To spend $848 in one day any way they want

THE REASON
Blender asked them to!

Georgia the donkey provided by Animals for Advertising. Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)





According to one newspaper the next day, Sui "gave the surf-chic craze a funky, glitzy twist." Unfortunately, neither Darkness nor donkey get the opportunity to make up their own minds about the designer's work, as our path into the pavilion is blocked by a part-man, part-mountain bouncer. After complimenting Dan on his Thin Lizzy T-shirt, the human blockade announces that there's no way we'll be allowed to upstage Sui's Hawaiian-print minidresses. Even *Blender*'s assertion that Georgia is both on the guest list and a close personal friend of designer Karl Lagerfeld falls on deaf ears.

"We're a bit like a donkey, aren't we? Amusing and hairy."

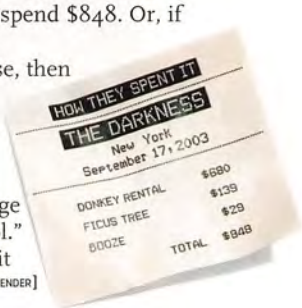
But the truth is that band and donkey have become the center of attention anyway, as a multitude of photographers shun their usual fashionista prey to snap our odd fivesome instead. The Darkness's point made (Justin: "See? Donkeys *are* the new black"), we regretfully bid adieu to Georgia and retire to a nearby watering hole for debriefing.

"I'm not disappointed in any way," Justin says, making swift work of his frozen margarita. "I'm really glad we did this. Hopefully, it will change people's perception of the donkey from an unglamorous horse to an absolutely fabulous creature in its own right."

Dan, meanwhile, is already thinking about the next time the Darkness will have the opportunity to spend $848. Or, if he has his way, $8,480.

"We'll get a big horse, then an elephant, a giraffe and so on," he explains. "Who knows? Maybe we'll take a blue whale down Broadway in a huge tank. That would be cool."

Gentlemen, we await your instructions. . . . [BLENDER]



Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)

THOM YORKE

MAY 28, 2003

ASTONISHING FACT

The Radiohead frontman struck this pose after being asked to "just be yourself."

This page: Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)

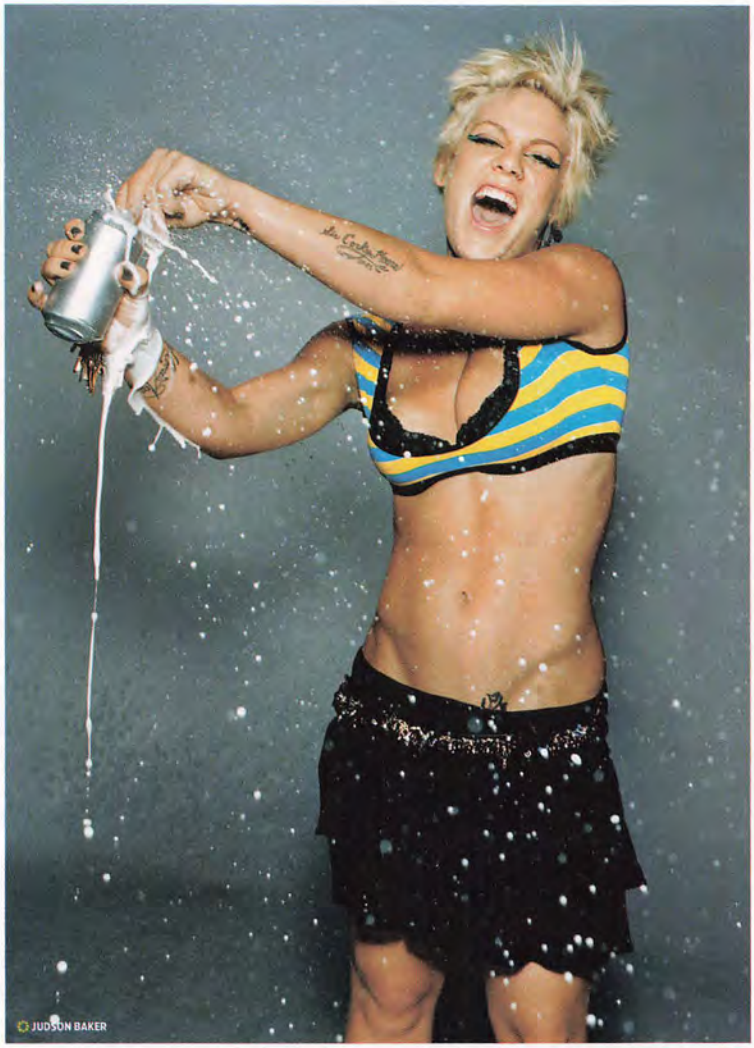
BEYONCÉ KNOWLES

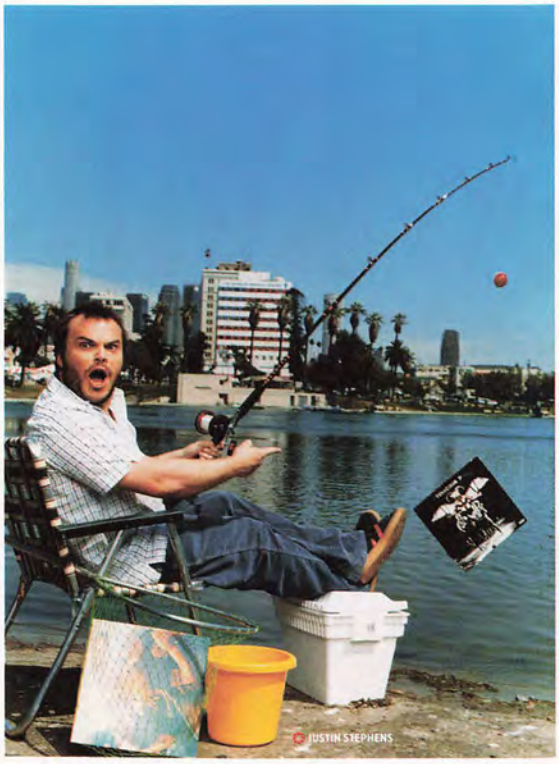
MAY 1, 2003

ASTONISHING FACT

When Beyoncé's mother, Tina, first saw her daughter in this outfit, the proud mom-stylist exclaimed, "Doesn't she look fantastic?" *Awww. . . .*

JUDSON BAKER


JUDSON BAKER


JUSTIN STEPHENS

PINK

AUGUST 27, 2003

ASTONISHING FACT Two prop stylists were occupied full-time shaking up the case of beer that was used to achieve the effect in the photo at the left.

JACK BLACK

AUGUST 1, 2003

ASTONISHING FACT Black's photo was taken in Los Angeles at the notorious junkie hangout MacArthur Park — that beautiful water is actually full of used needles.

THE DISTILLERS

JULY 24, 2003, LIVE AT CBGB IN NYC

ASTONISHING FACT All of Distillers lead singer Brody Dalle's instrument cases were bright pink. Is this the least or the most punk thing ever? You decide!

MATTHEW SALACUSE

Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)

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MANDY MOORE

AUGUST 28, 2003

ASTONISHING FACT The singer-actress was photographed in California's Pan Pacific Warehouse, a setting for countless films and TV shows including *XXX*, *St. Elmo's Fire* and *Alias*.

SHERYL NIELDS

JOE TORENO

THE FLAMING LIPS

APRIL 15, 2003

ASTONISHING FACT Lead singer Wayne Coyne took charge of hiring the strippers, one of whom danced onstage with the band later that night.

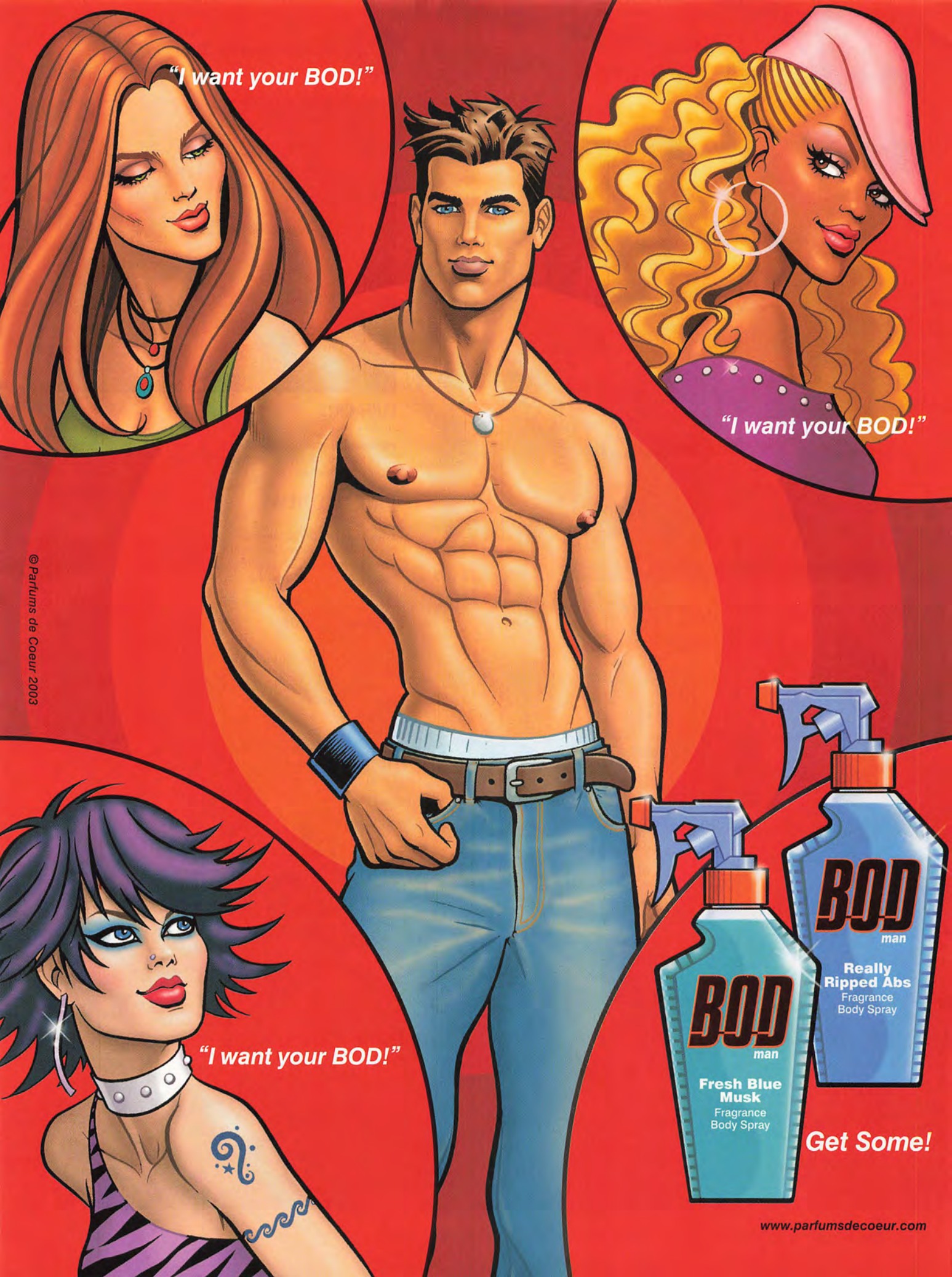
JEWEL

MARCH 31, 2003

ASTONISHING FACT The singer-poet's opening conversational gambit upon arriving to be photographed was, "Isn't it funny that so many heroin addicts are vegetarians?"

JUDSON BAKER

Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)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CHRIS BUCK

LEGO

LUDACRIS

AUGUST 6, 2003

ASTONISHING FACT When they weren't having their bras unhooked, the models babysat the lucky son of Ludacris's manager, Chaka Zulu.

DAVE MATTHEWS

JULY 27, 2003

ASTONISHING FACT During the photo shoot, held at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Dana Point, California, one passerby remarked, "Oh, look, there's John Mayer." Matthews's response? "I get that a lot."

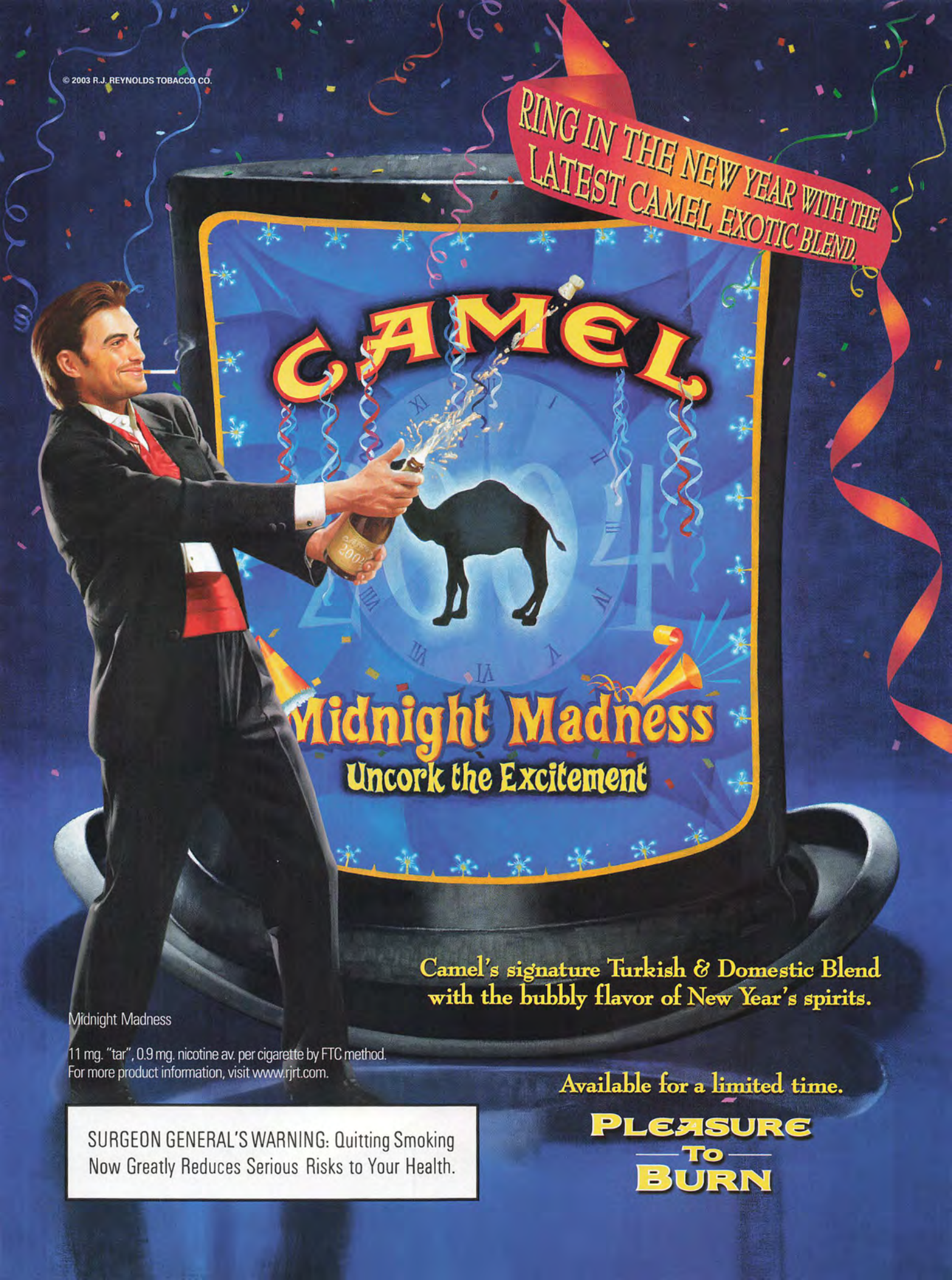
SHANIA TWAIN

JANUARY 16, 2003

ASTONISHING FACT The Canadian chanteuse was photographed at a beach house in Malibu, California, within sight of frolicking dolphins. Also, for a small lass, Shania's got a helluva strong handshake.

PEGGY SIROTA

Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)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["I've had friends die all the time."]

AMERICA'S FAVORITE

GANGSTA

The hip-hop sensation of 2003, *Blender*'s Artist of the Year, has a film-star girlfriend and a chart-topping posse. But it's not all good news for 50 Cent. He still has a bullet lodged in his mouth — and a price on his head!

BY WILLIAM SHAW
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHIL KNOTT

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

"AMSTERDAM!" announces 50 Cent, freshly arrived in Holland from last night's show in Zurich. "Sin city."

So, do you plan to indulge in the city's infamous red-light district?

"See, I would have fun out there, but I'm a pimp," he deadpans. "So it's against my religion to pay for girls."

Fair point. Actually, you're probably the last guy who would have to pay for tush.

The man currently romantically linked to bombshell actress Vivica A. Fox grins. "No," he says. "I'm doin' *aiight*."

A lot has changed for the former Curtis Jackson in the last 12 months. Last year he was driving a 1993 Dodge Caravan — "The *A-Team* van," he jokes. This year he has spent $70,000 customizing a classic 1965 Impala: "Anybody can get a new car. But a '65 Impala takes time."

That's nothing compared to what he's spent on houses. He has bought three, including a $4 million mansion that once belonged to Mike Tyson — a man he fantasized about mugging on his scurrilous 1999 underground single "How to Rob."

"That house," 50 marvels, "is *huge*."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THIS YEAR'S RISE of 50 Cent is no accident. What's clear if you spend any time around him is that he is a fiercely driven man. He works hard and demands that those with him do likewise.

He has been touring almost continually since April — with Clipse, by himself and on the top-selling Roc the Mic tour with Jay-Z. He's here in Europe now touring with his group, G-Unit.

"Can't stop 50," says Lloyd Banks, who at 21 is the youngest member of the G-Unit crew, most of whom, like 50 Cent, come from the drug-infested South Jamaica neighborhood in Queens, New York. "If he's not the hardest-working man in the industry, he's the second-hardest."

There is, it appears, nothing like being shot nine times to focus the mind. On May 24, 2000, 50 Cent was waiting in a car outside his grandmother's house in Queens when an unidentified gunman pulled up on 50's left side, got out and started shooting. Though armed himself, 50 didn't have a chance to reach for his gun. While urban legend has it that the gunman was murdered three weeks later, 50 miraculously survived his multiple bullet wounds. As he rhymes on his 6 million–selling album *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, "Now it's clear that I'm here for a real reason/'Cause he got hit like I got hit, but he ain't fucking breathing."

Ever since *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* sold a mammoth 1.6 million copies in its first two weeks of release, interviewers have never tired of asking 50 Cent to display his wounds. Some ask to peer in his mouth, where part of one of the bullets he took is still lodged.

"It doesn't bother me," 50 says. "I think it's the first time people have seen an artist who has reached this level who is openly talking about these things."

As Eminem puts it, "Kids want to see a guy who got shot that many times and lived. There's a mystique about him."

50 is so ghetto-macho that while he talked of having nightmares about the shooting on his song "Many Men," he now shrugs it off like a stubbed toe.

Doesn't common decency dictate that you should at least suffer from post-traumatic stress?

"Nah," 50 says with a straight face. "That's for regular people."

Banks and Young Buck, another G-Unit sidekick, burst out laughing. But the truth is, in a Nietzschean way, 50 Cent still seems to believe that getting shot was the best thing that happened to him.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

TO BEGIN WITH, the bullet that tore through his mouth changed his rapping voice, adding that slight trademark slur. He lost weight, becoming leaner, over the six weeks that he couldn't eat solid foods. And the assault panicked Columbia Records, his label at the time, into dropping him from his contract, which also worked in his favor. ➜

ARTIST OF THE YEAR!

Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)

After recovering, he returned to Queens and began releasing a series of mix tapes that built his extraordinary street reputation. One of his bootlegged CDs ended up on Eminem's stereo. Having heard about the shooting, Eminem was astonished to discover that 50 was still making music. Within weeks, Eminem had signed him to his and Dr. Dre's Shady/Aftermath label, and soon after, Dre, Em and 50 were busy creating the irresistibly upbeat career launching pad "In da Club."

It was during that enforced hiatus, too, that 50 found the time to put together the G-Unit, whose debut, *Beg for Mercy*, is due out shortly. "I've got the best-selling debut for a male solo artist," he boasts. "Now I'm planning on having the best-selling group debut."

The first member 50 chose for his group was his longtime friend Tony Yayo, who acquired his name (it comes from Spanish slang for cocaine, *lleyo*) while selling drugs on 50's turf in Queens.

Yayo is unable to be with us today — he's serving a yearlong jail sentence for gun possession at Rikers Island, New York's notoriously brutal prison.

His bandmates haven't visited him. As a convicted felon, 50 couldn't go even if he wanted to. But they think it's better that they stay away. "It makes it easier for him to get through his time if we don't communicate with him," Banks says.

Banks joined the crew after Yayo persuaded 50 Cent to listen to one of his mix tapes; Young Buck had been a protégé of the New Orleans rapper Juvenile.

Like 50's, Banks and Buck's arms are crawling with tattoos. Banks has DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR in big letters on his left hand. "That's the most important for me right now," he says somberly.

In 1999: Aww, wasn't he cute? Um, no.

Buck has G-UNIT and a picture of an AK-47 bullet on his right arm. "That's my weapon of choice when I hit your block," he declares.

It turns out all the members of G-Unit have been shot. Banks caught a stray bullet in the liver in 2001 while standing outside a Queens nightclub. Young Buck grew up in the roughest Nashville neighborhood, living in the J.C. Napier projects; he used to sell crack to his own stepfather. "Gunshots go out every day," he says. "Every second."

Buck was asleep one night when armed assailants attempted to rob his home. They cut the phone and electricity before bursting in and shooting him twice, once through an artery in the leg. He would have bled to death had an ambulance not arrived in time.

"He ain't breathin' no more, the guy who hit me," Buck says.

"He ain't breathin' no more, the guy who hit me," Buck says.

What happened to him?

Buck shrugs innocently. "I don't know."

↑ "Don't trust whitey — except me": 50 Cent and Eminem at the launch party for *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*

So it's like a qualification: You have to be bullet-riddled to be in G-Unit?

"Nah!" they chorus.

That said, it's clearly important to 50 Cent that his group has the appropriate ghetto cred. "Tell him about your father, Banks," he commands.

"In my neighborhood," Banks says, "if you've got your father and mother, you're lucky. My situation wasn't like that."

Banks barely knows his father. He lived with him for a couple of years, but mostly, his father spent his time incarcerated or on the run. He would appear occasionally, and Banks would hang out with him until he disappeared again.

"I saw my first murder when I was 10 years old — in front of me," Banks says. It was a friend of his father's. "Guy got his head blown off."

50's childhood was similarly nightmarish. His mother gave birth to him when she was 15. He doesn't know his father, and says he doesn't want to. His mom dealt crack; his grandparents raised him. When 50 was 8, his mother was murdered — someone spiked her drink, and when she was unconscious, turned on the gas. At age 12, 50 began a 10-year career dealing drugs.

Though he's often compared to Tupac Shakur, 50 doesn't share the late ➔

Clockwise from top left: Alphonse Telymonde (still-life); Anthony Cutajar/LFI; Lawrence Baker/Idols; Globe Photos; Kevin Mazur/WireImage.com; Alphonse Telymonde (still-life); Jim Cooper/APWideworld

50 CENT'S CRAZY YEAR! >>

It's been 12 months of wild ups and downs for 2003's top-selling artist

DECEMBER 31, 2002
50 Cent, along with his G-Unit crew, is arrested after New York police find two loaded guns in the rapper's SUV.

JANUARY 16, 2003
Shots are fired at New York's Violator Management, which oversees the careers of 50 Cent, Busta Rhymes, Missy Elliott and Mobb Deep.

FEBRUARY 6
50 Cent's major-label debut, *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, hits streets five days early to combat bootleggers . . .

FEBRUARY 12
. . . and, with 872,000 copies, sets a record for most albums sold by a debut artist the first week of release, topping Snoop Dogg's *Doggystyle*.

FEBRUARY 23
During his performance of "Lose Yourself" at the Grammy Awards, Eminem wears a FREE YAYO shirt, a reference to 50's incarcerated friend and G-Unit member Tony Yayo.

FEBRUARY 26
Sales for *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* reach 2 million.

FEBRUARY 27
Muckraking Web site TheSmokingGun.com publishes 50's court records from 1994, when he was busted twice on felony drug charges, once for trying to hide crack cocaine in a 16-year-old's underpants.

MARCH 13
50 Cent's security guards allegedly rough up the owner of a limousine service after a concert.

MARCH 19
Total sales for *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* exceed 3 million.

MARCH 28–29
50 shoots videos for "21 Questions" and "Many Men," does own stunts.

LATE MARCH
Investigators look into the theory that 50's feud with Murder Inc. contributed to the killing of Run-DMC's Jam Master Jay.

APRIL 15
Denies he's dating Beyoncé Knowles when he appears on *TRL* to hype the release of the *New Breed* CD/DVD.

APRIL 16
Total sales for *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* reach 4 million.

APRIL 23
Places two albums in the Top 5 the same week when *The New Breed* debuts at number 2.

APRIL 29
Signs book deal with MTV Books/Pocket Books to publish his autobiography but decides to drop the project's working title, *Number One with Nine Bullets*.

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rapper's "Dear Mama"–style sentimental vision of family life. Or Eminem's need to rake over the coals of his childhood.

"Was I affected by my mother's death? Yeah — probably as much as any 8-year-old kid would be," he says. "But I've had friends die all the time. You do what you got to do. Pay your respects. Move forward."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

MAYBE IT'S NO coincidence that this is 50 Cent's year. Gangsta rap first flourished during the economic downturn of the late '80s and early '90s, when increasing ghetto poverty and the rise of crack cocaine fed spiraling murder rates. In 2003, with the jobless rate at a nine-year high, gangsta is back with a vengeance.

50 sees a connection, too. "Absolutely!" he says. "If that's what's goin' on, then my music is a direct reflection of it."

His relentless playing of the gangsta card, though, has raised a few eyebrows. *The Source* magazine, which has been feuding with Eminem, Dr. Dre and subsequently 50 Cent, accused 50 of exaggerating his street past and hyping himself with well-publicized beefs like this year's mic battles with Ja Rule.

His animosity toward Ja Rule is rumored to stem partly from allegations that Ja's label boss, Murder Inc. CEO Irv Gotti, threatened other labels so they wouldn't sign a deal with 50. Last November, police investigating the previous month's murder of Run-DMC's Jam Master Jay questioned 50. Jay and 50 were close; in the late '90s Jay had given the then unknown rapper his first big break. One possible lead was that Jay's murder was somehow tied to the dispute between 50 Cent and Murder Inc.

When shots were fired at a New Jersey hotel this September just as 50 and G-Unit rolled in, some reports linked it to 50 Cent's troubles with Irv Gotti and Ja Rule. 50's entourage left the scene immediately, to the irritation of local police.

JAMES DIMMOCK

G-Unit, from left: Young Buck, 50 Cent, Lloyd Banks

Recently, police warned 50 Cent that there is a price on his head. Rival drug dealers from Queens are apparently incensed by his newfound fame. "They don't say who it is, though," he says, chuckling.

Did you ask the cops how much someone was willing to pay to have you killed?

Banks cracks up. "Did you hear that? 'How much were they willing to pay?' "

"No," 50 answers. "They didn't say that." He believes the police have cooked up the whole scenario to try to smoke out names of New York gangsters. "They just want me to give them information."

The Source claimed 50 was now in such fear for his life that he had saddled himself with a $4,500-a-day security retinue. He derides the figure as "bullshit."

"Vacation? I take a few days off, and then I get bored."

Then, with a small smile, he adds, "Don't go tell everybody that I don't spend that much, though."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THE INTERVIEW and photo shoot are winding down. 50 poses with a young Dutch fan. He gives the boy a T-shirt, a chain and a hat; he cheerfully mugs for photos. He is urbane, enthusiastic and relentlessly upbeat, clearly relishing the cartoonish role of *TRL* gangsta pimp.

He does it so well, it's easy to forget that in his former life, Curtis Jackson was a predatory, hard-nosed drug dealer. Like any rapper, he fictionalizes some of the violence of his street life, but he's also the man who rhymed, "They say you can never repay the price for takin' a man's life/I'm in debt with Christ — I done that twice."

The former dealer's bandwagon is still gaining speed. There are plans for a Banks solo album in March, followed by 50's own solo next summer. Young Buck's album will tentatively drop in September, and, parole board willing, Yayo's debut will come out after that. 50's autobiography is being published next February, and a script for an *8 Mile*–style biopic is being prepared.

50 hasn't actually spent time in his new $4 million mansion yet. He hasn't had the time.

"Vacation?" he says, shrugging. "I take off for a few days, and then I get bored and wonder where I'm at." [BLENDER]

50 CENT'S CRAZY YEAR! CONTINUED

MAY 6
Doctor who treated 50 for 2000 shootings resulting in those nine bullet wounds sues for $32,000 in unpaid medical bills.

JUNE 4
50 joins Russell Simmons and P. Diddy at Rally to Repeal Rockefeller Drug Laws in New York.

JUNE 11
Total sales for *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* reach 5 million.

JUNE 25
50 Cent kicks off the Roc the Mic tour with Jay-Z in Hartford, Connecticut.

LATE JUNE
Signs with William Morris talent agency, explores movie roles that would tell the story of his life.

JULY 12–13
Plays in front of 100,000 at Detroit's Ford Field with Eminem and Missy Elliott.

AUGUST 21
The Roc the Mic tour comes to a close in Detroit.

AUGUST 27
50's bodyguards allegedly attack a *New York Post* photographer who snapped 50 leaving Jacob the Jeweler's shop in Manhattan's diamond district.

AUGUST 28
50 Cent shows up with Vivica A. Fox at the MTV Video Music Awards, raps during Mary J. Blige's performance (he guests on her album) and wins Best New Artist and Best Rap Video.

SEPTEMBER 1
Macy's and Bloomingdale's begin carrying **the G-Unit clothing line.**

SEPTEMBER 2
Limo-service owner files suit against 50 Cent over March 13 incident, seeks unspecified damages.

SEPTEMBER 9
Shots are fired outside Doubletree Hotel in Jersey City, New Jersey; police say 50 Cent and his crew are central figures in the incident. They ask 50 to come in for questioning . . .

SEPTEMBER 10
. . . but instead, he goes to Los Angeles to shoot the video for G-Unit's debut single, "Stunt 101."

LATE SEPTEMBER
Purchases Mike Tyson's former Connecticut mansion for just over $4 million.

OCTOBER
The cover story in hip-hop magazine ***The Source*** **blasts 50 as a media-savvy gangsta wannabe.**

NOVEMBER 18
50 releases the CD *Beg for Mercy*, the first official project from G-Unit.

JENNIFER VINEYARD

Alphonse Telymonde (still-lifes, 2); James Dimmock (G-Unit); courtesy of Reebok (shoe); Dennis Van Tine/LFI (with Fox); Sam Mack/Retna Ltd. (Pac)

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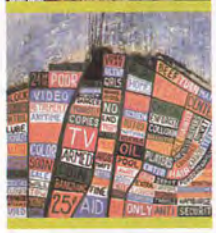
50 THE GREATEST ALBUMS OF 2003



Rap! Garage-rock! Teenage Russian lesbian Europop! We choose the year's most accomplished CDs, while the people who made them recall their favorite movies, songs and sexual encounters of the past 12 months

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BY JON CARAMANICA, NICK CATUCCI, NICK DUERDEN, KRIS EX, DORIAN LYNSKEY, JAMES SLAUGHTER, ROB TANNENBAUM, JONAH WEINER AND JON YOUNG

50
AESOP ROCK
BAZOOKA TOOTH
DEFINITIVE JUX

Underground motor-mouth makes indie hip-hop album of 2003

A New York rapper with a cynical worldview and a rolling, sticky tongue, Aesop Rock is the underground's most fabulous fabulist. *Bazooka Tooth* is his darkest opus yet, packed to the brim with bizarro storytelling and free-associative flashiness. The music — synth blips, dirty snares — is appropriately airless, like an urban alleyway.

49
GARY ALLAN
SEE IF I CARE
MCA NASHVILLE

Fifth album from Nashville sex symbol

Maybe one day, songs about dark whiskey and white lies, faithless lovers and unforgiving exes, will lose their eternal thrill. And maybe one day, clouds will suddenly turn red in the sky. Quietly, California honky-tonk singer Gary Allan has become a Nashville exemplar, with a voice as stubbly as his unshaved chin and a knack for galloping songs about miserable nights.

48
COLDPLAY
LIVE 2003
CAPITOL

The "new U2," live in Australia

Britain's leading rock band may have released only two studio albums, but Coldplay's greatest hits are legion. Here in Sydney, the best sing-along moments are the most emotive: "The Scientist" (*ooh*), "Trouble" (*aah*) and a lighter-waving "Yellow," which no doubt brings a tear to Gwyneth's eye.

47
BASEMENT JAXX
KISH KASH
XL/ASTRALWERKS

Don't flush your Ecstasy just yet . . .

When the gloomy consensus is that the party's over for dance music, Londoners Felix Buxton and Simon Ratcliffe offer the most compelling argument for not getting your coat quite yet. *Kish Kash* is their urgent, vital third album that forges thrilling alliances between R&B and hardcore rave, Siouxsie Sioux and JC Chasez, the booty and the brain.

46
THURSDAY
WAR ALL THE TIME
VICTORY/ISLAND

Major-label debut for thrillingly paranoid scream team

Memo to all the 17-year-old boys crying about mean girls and lame parents: It only gets worse when you're older. That's how these New Jersey emo punks tell it, taking their genre's melodrama beyond the lunchroom into more middle-aged subjects: Portentous riffs brood and explode, while singer Geoff Rickly wails about dead-end office jobs, fiery suicides and the militarization of everyday life. Get this man some Paxil!

45
STEELY DAN
EVERYTHING MUST GO
REPRISE

Intricately slinky soundtrack to a midlife crisis

Fiftysomething sleazebags Donald Fagen and Walter Becker age well. Their lush, jazz-licked, *smoove*-funk grooves, airtight after decades of relentless perfectionism, provide a luxurious cushion for yet more middle-aged falls from grace — whether it's a messy divorce or hitting on barely legal ladies with hip-hop slang. Why shouldn't sweaty funk be slathered in swank cologne?

Opposite page: Matthias Clamer/Corbis Outline

The Strokes: "You know, guys, maybe this isn't the way to the stage after all. . ."

44
THE STROKES
ROOM ON FIRE
RCA

New York City's great rock hopes return with a muddier sound

Julian Casablancas has a hangover. Where *Is This It* narrated downtown flings with a Rheingold in one hand and a Russian model in the other, this follow-up sips cold coffee and rubs at reddened eyes. Thankfully, the Strokes make weariness as compelling as three-day benders — as the somersaulting "Automatic Stop" proves, the hooks are still here; they've just got some dirt on 'em.

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR →

MACY GRAY

Eccentrically coiffed psychedelic princess of modern soul-rock

Favorite CD of 2003
The Trouble with Being Myself, Macy Gray. All modesty aside, it's incredible.

Favorite movie of 2003
Dirty Pretty Things. Deep.

Trend I'm most sick of
Downloading music for free.

My favorite new toy
The Snoop Dogg doll.

I'm totally obsessed with
Someone — but if he finds out I'm obsessed, he'll get all freaked out, and his head will get big. Then he won't be sexy to me anymore.

Best sex I've had this year
A real pimp wouldn't answer that question.

My 2003 regret
I have but one regret, and it happened in 1999.

Word or phrase of the year
Fuck you.

Who most needs a *Queer Eye* makeover?
Homer Simpson.

Is Kobe Bryant guilty?
I don't know, but I wish he would have called me.

Ambition for 2004
Bliss.

Macy Gray: Note magical amulet, jammies.

ART-ROCK FOR THE PEOPLE

43 PINK
TRY THIS
LaFACE/ARISTA

Bird-flipping, Britney-bashing star makes her punk move

The Philly flirt's third album — most of which was cowritten by Tim Armstrong of Rancid — jolts her saucy R&B and confessional rock with buzzsaw guitars, wafting organ and whipcrack beats. Meanwhile, anti-scenester sentiments like "You ain't nothing but a hooker, selling your fucking soul!" show that she's not just pissed at her dysfunctional family anymore. Her mother must be relieved.

42 MACY GRAY
THE TROUBLE WITH BEING MYSELF
EPIC

R&B troublewoman reminds us of the true meaning of *freak*

Three albums in, and Macy Gray's still psycho: She imagines herself walking on water, claims to have murdered the plumber who "plunged" her mother and wants you to "spread your love all over" her face. Then again, there's nothing normal about the way this vintage, string- and organ-soaked funk simply dangles off her sandpaper-ribbon voice.

41 LIGHTNING BOLT
WONDERFUL RAINBOW
LOAD

The sound of the underground smashing its face with a crowbar

Between them, these two Rhode Island art-metallers make enough noise to drown out a construction site. On their third album, Brian Gibson's tweaked bass cranks up high and wanky before drilling down into catchy grinds and grooves ("Dracula Mountain"), while Brian Chippendale rides splatter-punk drum gallops. Guaranteed to knock trucker caps sideways in hipster mosh pits.

40 RADIOHEAD
HAIL TO THE THIEF
CAPITOL

Grumbling Brits get in a fighting mood

The world's still going down the tubes, Radiohead figure, but after two albums of numb disaffection, the kings of inscrutable art-rock are ready to do something about it. There's a vein of defiance running from "I Will," Thom Yorke's tender promise to his infant son, to the blisteringly indignant "2+2=5," on which Yorke howls, "Pay attention!"

39 AMY RIGBY
TIL THE WHEELS FALL OFF
SIGNATURE

Nashville MILF's sad bedroom songs

Hearing that she's sometimes "colder than a frozen waffle" and passes on sex because "the eggs are frying," you might think this whispery alt-country siren doesn't get out of the kitchen often enough. Still, Rigby's bittersweet meditations on finding joy in adulthood's ruts and responsibilities gets steamy — especially when she begs you to "get down on the rug."

38 CAFE TACUBA
CUATRO CAMINOS
MCA

Are they Latin America's greatest art-rockers? *Sí!*

The fifth album from *roc en Español*'s reigning weirdos, a collective formed by design students from Mexico City, makes no overt bid for the American market — the words are all in Spanish, and the collisions of ambient electronica, fidgety punk and Latin balladry can't be tidily packaged. But just try to find a more glorious mess.

Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)

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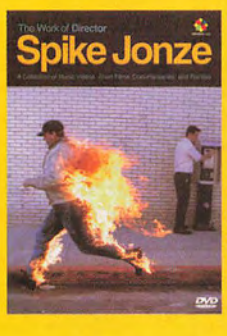

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ALL ABOUT MY YEAR →

DICK VALENTINE
ELECTRIC SIX

He wants to take you to a gay bar!

Best song I downloaded this year
"Rock Your Body," by Justin Timberlake. Nothing else comes close.

Favorite CD of 2003
Nocturama, by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds.

Favorite book of 2003
My Dutch-English phrasebook.

Trend I'm most sick of
Dangling from a crane in an enclosed cube and starving oneself.

My favorite new toy
My robotic dog. His name is Taco.

I'm totally obsessed with
Free meals.

The drunkest I was this year
We played a party in London for some billionaire. I ended up vomiting everywhere.

Best sex I've had this year
Fifth Amendment, dude. . . .

Word or phrase of the year
"Where are the weapons of mass destruction?"

Where I'll be on New Year's Eve
Earthbound . . . again. Sigh.

37
DAMIEN RICE
O
VECTOR

Literate Irishman makes the year's best come-back-for-coffee soundtrack

The world needs another acoustic singer-songwriter like it needs another round of *American Idol Juniors,* but Shortlist Prize winner Damien Rice is genuinely something special. Recorded in Rice's Dublin home, *O* is packed with beautifully understated tunes and the sort of thought-provoking, worldly lyrics that make men drink and women swoon — which may be why Glenn Close and Britney Spears have both been spotted at his gigs.

36
LIZ PHAIR
LIZ PHAIR
CAPITOL

Making moves on radio . . . and younger men

The famously horny indie queen has never hidden her taboo desires — indeed, she has reveled in them — and here she exposes a new one: her fetish for megapop. Phair, now a divorced mom, cops glittery stadium presence from Avril Lavigne's producers and others, but of course she still sasses about robbing the cradle and "hot white cum."

35
ELECTRIC SIX
FIRE
XL/BEGGARS GROUP

Detroit's finest one-track minds burn up the dance floor

"Fire in the disco! Fire in the Taco Bell!" Yes, indeed, and *Fire* also in the CD collection of anybody who values gloriously absurd disco-rock made by grown men who should know better. "Naked Pictures (Of Your Mother)" reveals a caustic satirical streak, but it's "Gay Bar" that provided the year's most irresistibly dumb rallying cry. Note: It helps if you're drunk.

THE RETURN OF LADY SOUL

34
ARETHA FRANKLIN
SO DAMN HAPPY
ARISTA

Back up, divas — there's a lady in the house

After proving herself a potent interpreter of hip-hop sensibilities with her last studio album, Franklin continues to show the wannabe divas how it's done. Letting her gospel roots branch across adult contemporary, soul and pop, her wondrous instrument takes over tracks with such aplomb that even Mary J. Blige's formidable turns are relegated to background-vocal status.

33
KATHLEEN EDWARDS
FAILER
ZOE/ROUNDER

Canadian singer-songwriter casts a harsh eye on losers

The musical offspring of Lucinda Williams and Neil Young boldly stakes out her own turf on this bracing debut, lacing familiar folk-rock textures with regret and sarcasm. From the pissed-off "Hockey Skates" to the melancholy "Sweet Lil' Deck," romance is a trap and escape a mirage in Edwards's unsparing small-town vignettes.

32
LIFESAVAS
SPIRIT IN STONE
QUANNUM

Funky debut from Portland, Oregon, boho-hip-hop revivalists

Rapping about the afterlife and Tarzan, self-improvement and Depeche Mode songs, the FBI's counter-intelligence programs and jerk chicken, Lifesavas temper their spirituality and political riffs with a playful knack for pop-scouring detail. The bouncy funk samples and assured lyricism on "Soldierfied" and "Hellohihey" suggest early-'90s consciousness-raisers the Native Tongues — though they could stand to sing less.

Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)

I AM POWERED BY THE SUN. I WILL NEVER STOP. I AM PRECISE. I AM G-SHOCK

THE ATOMIC SOLAR G-SHOCK

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ALL ABOUT MY YEAR →

FANCY
FANNY PACK

Pencil-mustached co-Svengali

Best song I downloaded this year
The DJ Screw mix of "I Got 5 on It," by Luniz.

Favorite CD of 2003
I like the blank ones. They're cheaper.

Favorite movie of 2003
Anything with lasers and/or monsters in it.

Favorite book of 2003
One about how animals have sex. Dolphins occasionally rape each other, as well as turtles and, apparently, eels.

Trend I'm most sick of
People thinking it's really funny to say *fashizzle my nizzle.*

I'm totally obsessed with
Calling waiters, stewardesses and cabdrivers "nurse." As in "Excuse me, nurse, could we get some more bread, please?"

Best sex I've had this year
From being on tour, I've developed an appreciation for having sex with other people in the room.

Word or phrase of the year
The.

Is Kobe Bryant guilty?
I hope so. If you can't coerce your fans into sex, then who can you? [*Editor's note: Coercing anyone into sex is illegal.*]

For tax purposes, Fanny Pack like to be paid in concrete.

31
FANNY PACK
SO STYLISTIC
TOMMY BOY

Lippy teens who know how to rump-shake

Not stupid meaning *bad* but stupid meaning *good,* Fanny Pack — three girls and two boys from New York — have perfected the art of the street-credible jock jam. They do electro, they do hip-house, they do Miami bass. No one else could have a track called "Boom Boom" and have it be materially different from the one called "System Boomin'." No one else would care enough.

MMM . . . FAUX LESBIANS

30
T.A.T.U.
200 KM/H IN THE WRONG LANE
INTERSCOPE

Having a gay old time redefining girl power

Russia's most adorable teen "lesbian" pop stars — OK, Russia's *only* teen "lesbian" pop stars — fall in love, run away from home and chirp a Smiths song with more charm and verve than divas twice their size. Not only that, but the Euro dance beats they frolic over sound as jubilantly rebellious as the girls themselves.

29
OBIE TRICE
CHEERS
SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE

Fun-lovin' pseudo-gangsta with Eminem's seal of approval

Bullet wounds: zero. Mix tapes: none. A boisterous single about girls without teeth? Check! Eminem's latest protégé talks about .45's and cocaine some, but he's more interested in cataloging flawed dating prospects worthy of a ghetto *Seinfeld* episode: gold diggers, homely one-nighters and ladies with, um, dentures. Mean production from Em, Dr. Dre and Timbaland offsets the comedy.

28
WARREN ZEVON
THE WIND
ARTEMIS

Putting death on hold for a raucous, heart-breaking farewell

Diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, Warren Zevon summoned his remaining strength to make a knockout goodbye album. Dark-humored rockers like the rowdy "Disorder in the House" give no quarter, while tender ballads emphasize the cracks in his ravaged, fading voice. Pop music has never confronted mortality more honestly.

27
THE DISTILLERS
CORAL FANG
WARNER BROS.

Third album from mohawked Aussie hottie and her buddies

Balancing husky vocals and dry-heave screams, 24-year-old punkstress Brody Dalle channels Courtney Love's femme fury — but with pouty lips and studded belts rather than smudged makeup and saggy stockings. On the foursome's major-label debut, Pixies producer Gil Norton massages the band's L.A. hardcore roots with big riffs and grungy dynamics, most memorably on the single "Drain the Blood."

26
GRANDADDY
SUMDAY
V2

Tearjerking soundtracks for sad robots

On their third album, the Raymond Carvers of cosmic country-rock refine their blissful melancholia to perfection. *Sumday* unfolds like a book of intricately detailed short stories in which some characters are learning to let go while others are trying desperately to hold on. Warm and humane, this is what Kurt Cobain meant by the comfort in being sad.

David Yellin

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR →

LARS ULRICH
METALLICA

Ex-Internet hating drum animal

Best song I downloaded this year
"Crazy Horses," by the Osmonds.

Favorite CD of 2003
Elephant, by the White Stripes. The most unique, original, hopeful, spontaneous collection of music recorded this year.

Favorite book of 2003
The Oh Really? Factor: Unspinning Fox News Channel's Bill O'Reilly, by Peter Hart.

Trend I'm most sick of
Limpbizkit bashing.

My favorite new toy
My iPod. This MP3 stuff is pretty cool.

Best sex I've had this year
Spectravision — Four Seasons Hotel, Washington, D.C., July 18.

I'm totally obsessed with
Death. Everybody tries to convince me it's part of life and to accept it, but I'm still not sold.

The drunkest I was this year
Too numerous to mention. But a particularly pathetic moment was waking up somewhere in the Midwest, reaching for the glass of water on my night table and tasting, or getting a mouthful of, the vodka tonic that had been my nightcap about six hours earlier.

Lars Ulrich: "Look into my eyes. . . . Stop downloading! Stop downloading!"

Word or phrase of the year
Forhelvede! The mother-tongue equivalent of what you say when you drop a large object on your foot.

Ambition for 2004
To be able to look back on it.

25
METALLICA
ST. ANGER
ELEKTRA

A return to twisted, smoking form

Bruised by their battle with Napster and, in ringleader James Hetfield's case, a stretch in rehab, America's quintessential metal-heads swing back with a fury they haven't mustered in over a decade. Every craggy, bitter cut lasts between five and nine minutes, which is enough time for Hetfield to exhaust his rage — or, in one case, to work up to a desperate "kill, kill, kill" coda.

24
JACK JOHNSON
ON AND ON
ISLAND

Surfer dude's blissful follow-up to platinum *Brushfire Fairytales*

Johnson's herbal-scented second album never really gets going, but its seductive *mañana* vibe made it this summer's ideal sunset soundtrack. Mixing acoustic folk with gentle reggae, it's reminiscent of a narcoleptic Lenny Kravitz. Johnson is too cool for his own boots, and so laid-back he's practically horizontal.

23
THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS
ELECTRIC VERSION
MATADOR

Graduate-school power-pop from north of the border

These deceptively simple songs bristle with zinging guitar licks, jittery keyboards and surrealistic mumbo-jumbo sung in tightly wound harmonies. Songwriter-dictator Carl Newman orchestrates the Vancouver fivesome, but underused alt-country boho Neko Case is the band's true star: On "The Laws Have Changed," you can almost feel the welts across your backside.

22
DIZZEE RASCAL
BOY IN DA CORNER
XL (BRITISH IMPORT)

England's great black hope

Closer to the streets than the Streets, 18-year-old MC/producer Dylan Mills is the most hair-raisingly extreme voice in British hip-hop. As the beats shudder and squeal, Mills (who says he owes as much to Kurt Cobain as to Tupac Shakur) reports with rising panic and pungent wit on the badlands of London's East End, where "eight millimeters settle debates."

50 Cent spots someone with an even bigger watch.

THE 20 BEST SINGLES OF 2003

The songs that made the whole world sing!

1 **50 CENT** "In da Club"
2 **OUTKAST** "Hey Ya!"
3 **BEYONCÉ** "Crazy in Love"
4 **THE WHITE STRIPES** "Seven Nation Army"
5 **PANJABI MC FEATURING JAY-Z** "Beware of the Boys (Mundian to Bach Ke)"
6 **JUNIOR SENIOR** "Move Your Feet"
7 **ELECTRIC SIX** "Gay Bar"
8 **CHRISTINA AGUILERA** "Beautiful"
9 **SEAN PAUL** "Get Busy"
10 **JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE** "Cry Me a River"
11 **FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE** "Stacy's Mom"
12 **KELIS** "Milk Shake"
13 **R. KELLY** "Snake"
14 **!!!** "Me and Giuliani Down by the Schoolyard (A True Story)"
15 **LUMIDEE** "Never Leave You (Uh-Ohhh, Uh-Ohhh!)"
16 **NAS** "Made You Look"
17 **SPYMOB** "It Gets Me Going"
18 **KATY ROSE** "Overdrive"
19 **ADAM GREEN** "Jessica Simpson"
20 **FANNY PACK** "Cameltoe"

Bootylicious forecast? Good.

Alphonse Telymonde (still-life), Melanie Weiner/Retna Ltd. (Ulrich), James Dimmock (50 Cent), Markus Klinko & Indrani/Sony (Knowles)

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

CALEB FOLLOWILL
KINGS OF LEON

Nouveau Southern boogie-rocker

Best song I downloaded this year
Neutral Milk Hotel, "In the Airplane Over the Sea." The best song to listen to when you're altered.

Favorite CD of 2003
The Kills, *Keep on Your Mean Side*. It's pure sex.

Trend I'm most sick of
Nonsmokers.

My favorite new toy
Rollerskates. My bandmates Matt [Followill] and Nathan [Followill] skate every sound check to "Islands in the Stream," by Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton.

I'm totally obsessed with
Family Guy. The funniest show on TV.

The drunkest I was this year
Obviously I don't remember. Don't you know how often we drink?

Best sex I've had this year
Japan — they leave their cards on the pillow when they leave.

Word or phrase of the year
"Where's Matt and Jared?"

Ambition for 2004
To get more sleep.

Kings of Leon: "Aw, Dad, do we have to mow the *whole* lawn?"

21 LUCINDA WILLIAMS
WORLD WITHOUT TEARS
LOST HIGHWAY

Fifty-year-old roots diva still looking for love in all the wrong places

The Southern country-rock queen of heartache raps on her seventh (and seventh excellent) album — and does it better than Madonna, too. Brooding, burred, restless, drawling, "raw and exposed," as she sings on one Stonesy rocker, she finds the truth about relationships in images of blood and vomit, summer fruit and Neil Young records.

20 CURSIVE
THE UGLY ORGAN
SADDLE CREEK

Nebraska art-punks play emo for grownups

"Your self-inflicted pain/Is getting too routine," Tim Kasher screams at himself. Emo histrionics and neurotic skepticism wrestle on the fourth album by these Bright Eyes buddies: Jagged, cello-driven art-rock heightens the drama as Kasher questions his capacity for emotion. The CD title curses his music, his heart — and his love muscle.

19 DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS
DECORATION DAY
NEW WEST

Dirty Southerners clean out their closets

The best country-rock band in America trots out the Southern Gothic themes you'd expect — work, babies, death, jail, trailers, drifters, drinking, "consensual brother/sister incest" — but stewards them with such grace and empathy, you might forget you're listening to five hairy men from Alabama. Lines like "Got your fine-ass self on the back of my lids" should remind you, though.

ALL-STAR LINEUP

18 THE NEPTUNES
THE NEPTUNES PRESENT . . . CLONES
STAR TRAK/ARISTA

Greetings, Earth people: Your planet is ours

Pharrell Williams and Chad Hugo are so omniscient right now, the only way to get any bigger in 2004 would be a White House run. Until then, there's *Clones*, on which they rewrite their own cyberpop script in enough ways to leave the competition grasping. Featuring more stars than a Video Music Awards photo call, this album even rehabilitates Ol' Dirty Bastard.

17 THE RAVEONETTES
CHAIN GANG OF LOVE
COLUMBIA

Surf-pop + feedback + sex + black jackets = one-trick genius

Sune Rose Wagner and Sharin Foo have only one idea — and, strictly speaking, it belongs to the Jesus & Mary Chain — but they make it go a long way. All cheekbones and cigarettes, the Danish duo look like a '50s biker movie brought roaring to life, and they sound like one too, spitting tasty wads of noise-pop bubblegum.

16 KINGS OF LEON
YOUTH & YOUNG MANHOOD
RCA

Hypnotic backwoods rocking from the Southern Strokes

Kings of Leon — three deeply Tennesseean brothers and a cousin — look like shell-shocked Vietnam vets coaxed down from the hills by Willie Nelson, and their debut sounds as though it has been maturing in an oak casket for 30 years. A fermenting stew of heady, rustic blues, New Wave chops and mumbled stoner vocals, its good-time charms are as contagious as they are timeless.

Alphonse Telymonde (still-life); Kevin Westenberg/NME (Kings of Leon)

Certain death at your
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12 o'clock

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Suggestive Themes
Violence

fasa studio

Microsoft game studios

Buckle up because Crimson Skies® is a deadly ride. Play single player as an air pirate at the helm of a tricked-out 1930s warplane. Because you're fueled by revenge, anyone foolish enough to enter your airspace is an enemy. Play on Xbox *Live*™ to pick a dogfight with up to 15 friends and strangers. Just remember, as you enjoy sending opponents into a fiery death spiral, someone probably has you in their crosshairs. Good luck, you are cleared to rule the skies.

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ALL ABOUT MY YEAR →

JUSTIN HAWKINS
THE DARKNESS

Unitarded rock yodeler extraordinaire!

Best song I downloaded this year
Ten Benson, "Rock Cottage."

Favorite CD of 2003
Foreigner, *Jukebox Heroes: The Foreigner Anthology.*

Trend I'm most sick of
Garage-rock.

My favorite new toy
Hermès sandals.

I'm totally obsessed with
Sharks.

The drunkest I was this year
Dublin, October 2. I drank Sambuca, trashed a toilet and threw a watch at somebody.

Best sex I've had this year
Wait for the book. . . .

Word or phrase of the year
Fucking leeches! This refers to everybody who isn't in the Darkness.

Who most needs a *Queer Eye* makeover?
Phil Collins.

Ambition for 2004
Record a second album and call it *Bad Diet.*

The Darkness's Justin Hawkins: Don't panic, ladies. That's his *tail.*

Alphonse Telymonde (still-life); Simon Songhurst/Camera Press/Retna Ltd. (Hawkins); Danielle Levitt/Corbis Outline (Sparxxx)

VERY METAL!

15
THE DARKNESS
PERMISSION TO LAND
ATLANTIC

Pomp-rock for the iPod generation

Proof that no murky corner of rock history is safe from a revival, this British quartet's ransacking of '70s metal co-opts the good stuff — slack-jawed AC/DC riffing, Freddie Mercury's operatic trilling and satin jumpsuits — and serves it up with a knowing wink. Joyful party metal, best heard while crushing empty beer cans against your head.

14
BUBBA SPARXXX
DELIVERANCE
BEAT CLUB/INTERSCOPE

The second-best white rapper in the world

Producer Timbaland has been studying his history books, digging in dusty crates and chugging his moonshine, and the sonics he gives Bubba Sparxxx for his second album are nothing short of a new paradigm for Southern hip-hop — or, for that matter, Southern rock. Juggling fiddles and harmonicas, songs like "Jimmy Mathis" and "Comin' Round" are an unpretentious blend of old and new, and Bubba's twangy raps are a perfect fit.

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR →

BUBBA SPARXXX

Husky rapper from the Deep South

Best song I downloaded this year
"Damn!", by the Youngbloodz. A club goes bananas when that shit comes on.

Favorite CD of 2003
The Natural, by Haystak. Good, Southern, hard-as-fuck hip-hop.

Favorite book of 2003
Bleachers, by John Grisham. Classic Grisham with a football theme. Genius!

Trend I'm most sick of
Trucker-style clothing. It's a little fucked up when folks in Hollywood dress like my neighbors in rural Georgia.

I'm totally obsessed with
Women's breasts. Big, beautiful breasts. Real, fake, who gives a fuck? Tits are incredible.

Best sex I've had this year
I was in Miami. Porn star. She was up to the challenge. A beautiful night, but exhausting.

Is Kobe Bryant guilty?
Hell, no! One word: *consent.*

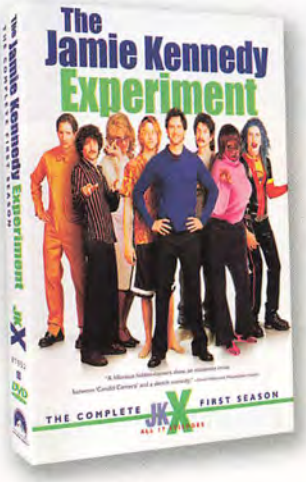
Ambition for 2004
Start dating Jaime Pressly. That's it. I do that, I'm straight. I might record a song or two while I wait.

Bubba Sparxxx: Fine — keep the damn ball!

Watch these and choose all that apply:

- ❒ A) Laughed my ass off.
- ❒ B) Blew beer out my nose.
- ❒ C) Cried. Farted. Wet my pants.

Available 12/16/03



Available 12/2/03

PARENTAL ADVISORY EXPLICIT CONTENT

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ALL ABOUT MY YEAR →

BEN MOODY
EVANESCENCE

Surprisingly randy goth-rock guitarist

Best song I downloaded this year
"Cry Me a River," by Justin Timberlake.

Favorite movie of 2003
School of Rock.

Favorite book of 2003
The Action Hero's Handbook. I can now kill a great white shark, take a bullet and turn sexual tension into hot, passionate lovemaking.

My favorite new toy
Ultra Vibe Pleasure 2000.

Best sex I've had this year
Myself. Let's face it, no one knows how to please you like you do.

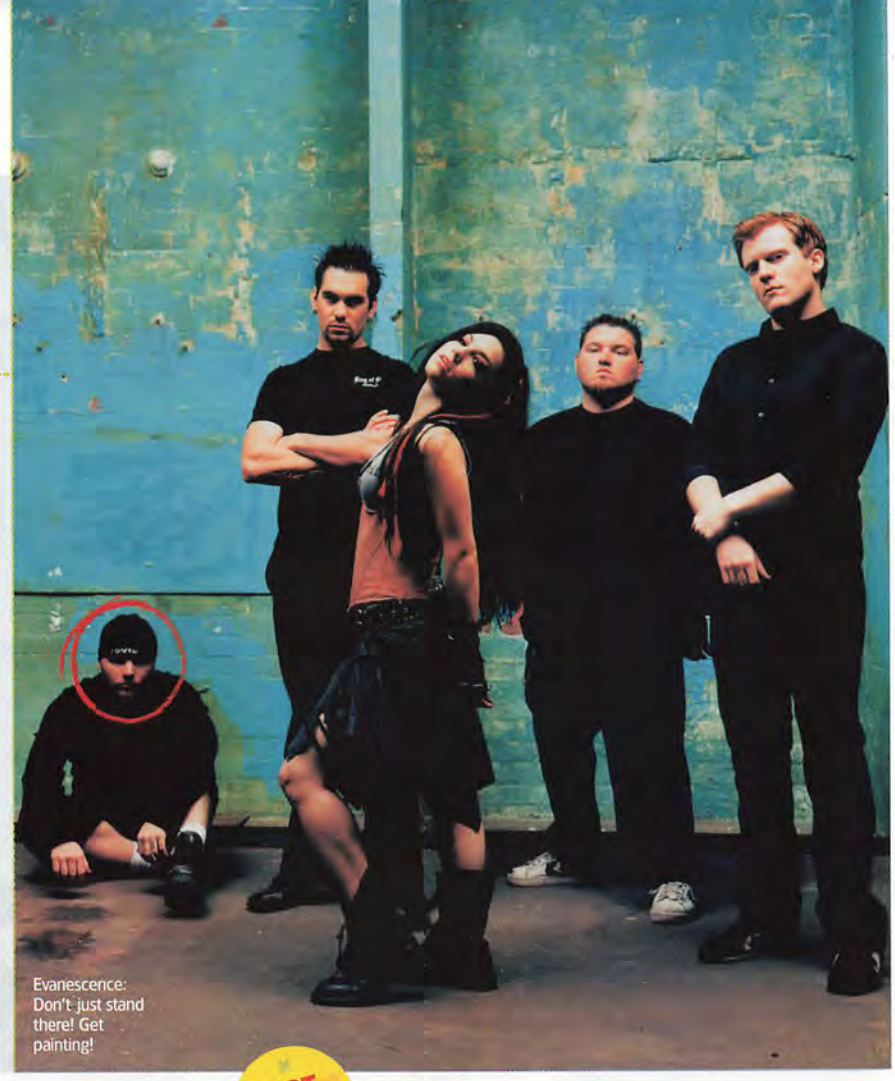
My 2003 regret
Answering that last question.

Word or phrase of the year
Holla!

Who most needs a *Queer Eye* makeover?
[Evanescence lead singer] Amy Lee.

Where I'll be on New Year's Eve
I'll be making whoopie on a pool table with whoever's legal.

Ambition for 2004
Asking Amber Tamblyn [star of TV's *Joan of Arcadia*] to the movies. I'm vulnerable and on the rebound. Use me.



Evanescence: Don't just stand there! Get painting!

13
DASHBOARD CONFESSIONAL
A MARK, A MISSION, A BRAND, A SCAR
VAGRANT/INTERSCOPE

Deft big-time debut from MTV2 sing-along cult hero

King of Pain Chris Carrabba and his intimate punk-ballad catharsis go public on his major-label bow, featuring music to match the scope of his heartache. The music is radio-ready, but the lyrics still sound straight off the diary page. "Ghost of a Good Thing" is resigned, "Am I Missing" is bitter and "Hands Down," with its lonely-boy dreams, is majestic.

12
R. KELLY
CHOCOLATE FACTORY
JIVE

R&B's Pied Piper chooses twerk over tact

The tempos stay low on R. Kelly's first album since his 2002 arrest on child-pornography charges, but his horniness is recklessly, thrillingly high here. "Ignition" (and its included remix) flies in the face of propriety with unveiled automotive come-ons, while "Snake" builds a pelvis-charged party around a naughty flute line.

11
JUNIOR SENIOR
D-D-DON'T DON'T STOP THE BEAT
ATLANTIC

Danish duo's message: Dance, have sex, repeat

What a bargain: 10 albums in one! Two great Danes with a kitchen sink full of retro styles — post-kitsch electropop ("Go Junior, Go Senior"), '60s bubblegum ("Shake Me Baby"), disco-funk ("Move Your Feet") — double-handedly rescue dance music, all without a hint of irony. "We want to give you a heart attack!" they shout. Mission accomplished.

10
EVANESCENCE
FALLEN
WIND-UP

Linkin Park of 2003, with a notable, dress-wearing difference

That goth chick in art class finally grew up and made an album, and it's a titanic sound clash of monster metal and breathy balladeering. Ben Moody knows how to use guitar crunch for percussive effect, and siren Amy Lee wails every aria of confusion ("Tourniquet," "Going Under") as if she's facing the firing squad.

9
50 CENT
GET RICH OR DIE TRYIN'
SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE

The cheeriest thug hip-hop album of all time

On *Get Rich*, instant superstar 50 Cent delivers gangster tales with a smirk that never seems to fade. He's positively vicious on "Back Down," bottle-popping and taunting on "In da Club" and melancholy and arrogant on "Many Men (Wish Death)." For the first time in hip-hop, its biggest star is also its rawest.

8
YEAH YEAH YEAHS
FEVER TO TELL
INTERSCOPE

New York art-punks justify the hype

For anyone disgruntled that you can't even smoke in CBGB anymore, this frothed-about Brooklyn trio evoke all the grit and glamour of a fantasy New York, frozen in time circa 1980. Purring and yelping like a cat on a hot tin roof, Karen O has her dominatrix moves down pat, while the beautiful "Maps" proves that she can tackle love and loss as well.

Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)

Becareful.

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Drinking a shot with friends should be enjoyable. So please be careful.

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR →

ADAM SCHLESINGER

FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE

The brains behind the brainiest guitar band of 2003

Best song I downloaded this year
Beyoncé, "Crazy in Love." I think Beyoncé might be Mutt Lange in disguise.

Trend I'm most sick of
That whole "not selling 5 million Fountains of Wayne records" trend. That is getting so old.

My favorite new toy
Sarah Silverman blow-up doll.

The drunkest I was this year
Dude, me and my friends got really wasted this one time — it was so funny!

Best sex I've had this year
What is this, *Blender Forum*?

My 2003 regret
Not looting more during the blackout.

Word or phrase of the year
"Slap me five!" Runner-up: "Slap me 10!"

Where I'll be on New Year's Eve
Times Square. That always looks like fun on TV.

Ambition for 2004
To create my own dance-contest TV show, à la *The Wade Robson Project*.

Fountains of Wayne: "Dude, that Garfield is one *funny* cat."

GUITAR HEROISM!

7 BEYONCÉ

DANGEROUSLY IN LOVE
COLUMBIA

The hottest-looking genius in pop

She's a survivor, after all, and rugged enough to master a whole host of R&B styles. There's the silky "Be With You," the sultry "Baby Boy" and the insistent "Crazy in Love" (with Jay-Z), easily the best song by a couple who don't admit to being a couple, even in the pledge-of-love song they perform together.

6 THE LIBERTINES

UP THE BRACKET
ROUGH TRADE

Life imitates art for cockney punk delinquents

Pete Doherty's eviction from his own group and subsequent incarceration for burgling bandmate Carl Barat's apartment was one of the year's grimmest falls from grace. It certainly gave a painfully authentic tang to *Up the Bracket*'s white-knuckle portrayal of London as a smoky, boozy, Dickensian underworld sound-tracked by the Jam and the Clash. Let's hope that they manage to make another.

5 JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

JUSTIFIED
JIVE

Pass that King of Pop crown . . .

Years from now, boy-band refugees will pore over *Justified* for tips on how to stay on top. This is Michael Jackson's *Off the Wall* revamped for the *TRL* generation, combining state-of-the-art beats, faintly risqué sexuality and swaggering confidence without even breaking a sweat. Stepping out with Cameron Diaz confirms Timberlake's status as bona fide pop royalty.

4 RYAN ADAMS

ROCK N ROLL
LOST HIGHWAY

Former alt-country scamp gets his rocks off

With a riff repertoire that ranges from silvery Smiths drones to '70s Stones crunch, T. Rex glam to Nirvana grunge, Adams makes the best-feeling rock record of the year, ditching his acoustic musings for big-amped ebullience. Merrily "dancing in the coma of the drinks I just had," he finally fulfills eight years of next-big-thing hype, only some of which he himself uttered.

3 FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE

WELCOME INTERSTATE MANAGERS
S-CURVE/VIRGIN

Revenge of the thirtysomethings

Characters in Fountains of Wayne's elegant pop songs perpetually face loss, but they never seem to lose their innocence. They long for better jobs ("Bright Future in Sales") and for women who will never have them ("Hackensack"). But they never face up to failure, their optimism buoyed by the band's gift for understated, ineffable guitar-pop.

2 OUTKAST

SPEAKERBOXXX/THE LOVE BELOW
ARISTA

One hundred thirty-five minutes of unfiltered brilliance

Even though André 3000 and Big Boi barely show up to say hello to each other on these two solo discs (packaged together), the sound of each is unmistakably Outkast. Big Boi motors through power-packed hip-hop tracks that bring the avant-garde to the Southern club. And André, with songs that ape the Beatles and Prince, realizes that moving past hip-hop is the crunkest move of all.

Alphonse Telymonde (still-life); Michael Lewis/Corbis Outline (Fountains of Wayne)

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"I LIKE TO BREAK THE RULES"

White Stripe Jack White on *Elephant*, reality TV and the temptations of stardom

So, Jack, how does it feel to have made *Blender*'s Album of the Year?
I'm flattered, and I think Meg would be, too. When we finished this record, I felt as though something really interesting had happened.

On *Elephant*, you allowed yourself to break your own rules, like the one banning guitar solos. Which rules will you break next?
I don't really know. At different times I like to break the rules. *Elephant*'s "There's No Home for You Here" is a super-breaking of our rules, to see how explosive we could be on just an eight-track. So the eight-track became our new rule.

Do you ever download music?
No, I never have. I don't even know how to, actually. I love buying an album. I hate even having a copy of a CD that doesn't have the picture. It doesn't feel like it's the real album.

What trend are you most sick of?
Reality television. I just don't know when it's going to stop. Shows like *Are You Hot or Not?* — what is the world coming to? When you're dedicating a whole show to being mean and judgmental, it's not really teaching the new generation anything morally valuable.

You've indicated you're not the biggest hip-hop fan. What about it don't you like?
In black music, you used to see a new thing every two years. First there was blues, then jazz, rock & roll, Motown, funk. . . . It regenerated all the time. But hip-hop hasn't regenerated itself for the last 15 years. People criticize our band for having our head in the '60s, but hip-hop artists are considered cutting-edge even though they're doing the same thing that was done in 1986. It's a confusing double standard.

After your recent car accident, did you think for a moment that you might not be able to play guitar ever again?
Yeah, there was a moment there. It still hasn't healed. I'm still concerned about it. But there's something about my head: I never get nervous about things. I just assume that whatever's happening is happening because it's supposed to.

What have you learned about celebrity this year?
I've learned that a lot of things that happen to us really don't matter that much. People always say, "Man, you guys have been on the cover of every magazine!" But it's not as if we've sold 15 million albums like Linkin Park have. We've sold 1 million copies of *Elephant*, which is amazing for us, but it's a far cry from real fame.

What did you say no to this year?
Artistically, the temptation to spend a lot of time in the studio and spend a lot of money on recording, trying to make an album with a big hit. That temptation is always there. If someone's offering you a magazine cover or asking you to perform on an awards show, most bands would say yes, but sometimes you just decide enough is enough. There's no point in beating it over people's heads.

DORIAN LYNSKEY

1

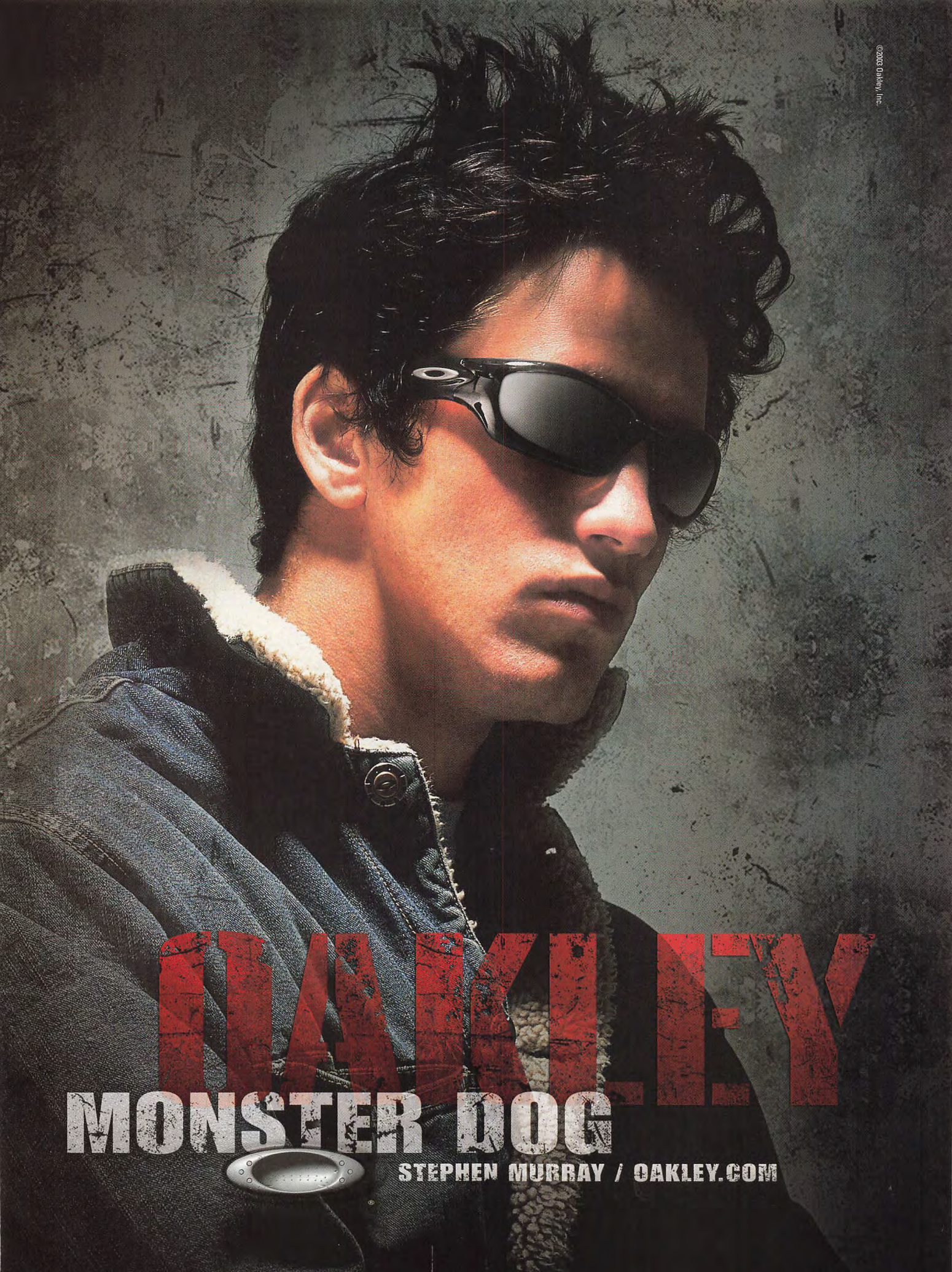
THE WHITE STRIPES
ELEPHANT

THIRD MAN/V2

The world's most famous faux siblings go huge

Jack White could boost a band's career just by saying its name, and *Elephant* almost justifies such quasi-papal infallibility. Everything that made the Whites' first three albums tick — the black-magic blues, the curious sexual politics and the way Jack makes his guitar speak in tongues — is finessed to staggering perfection.

Jack White (still-life); Dean Chalkley/NME (The White Stripes)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MONSTER DOG
STEPHEN MURRAY / OAKLEY.COM

Christina's lectures on the Madonna/whore complex were always well-attended.

THIS PAGE: EARRINGS AND LOVE NECKLACE FROM **XIV KARATS OF BEVERLY HILLS**; VINTAGE CROSS, NECKLACE, ROSARY AND CAPE FROM **UNIVERSAL COSTUME**. TOP BY **GAELYN & CIANFARANI**, SKIRT BY **MOUXMOUS@AOL.COM**

OPPOSITE PAGE: EARRINGS BY **STEPHEN WEBSTER LTD.**; NECKLACE BY **TOM BINNS FROM MAXFIELD, L.A.**; CORSET FROM **PLAYMATES, L.A.**; DRESS BY **LLOYD KLEIN**

THE BAD ✝ THE DIRRTY

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BECOME BLENDER'S WOMAN OF THE YEAR? FOR CHRISTINA AGUILERA, A FEARLESS APPROACH TO RECORD-MAKING, A GOOD PAIR OF ASSLESS CHAPS AND A REFRESHING EAGERNESS TO TALK TRASH: ABOUT MTV, BEYONCÉ AND BRITNEY, BRITNEY, BRITNEY. "THESE PEOPLE AREN'T ARTISTS!" SHE ROARS. "THEY'RE JUST . . . FAKE."

BY NICK DUERDEN • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUDSON BAKER

BRING HIM over," she says to her personal assistant as *Blender* arrives at the front door. She, incidentally, is naked on her bed except for a sheet clutched to her breast. "I want to say hello."

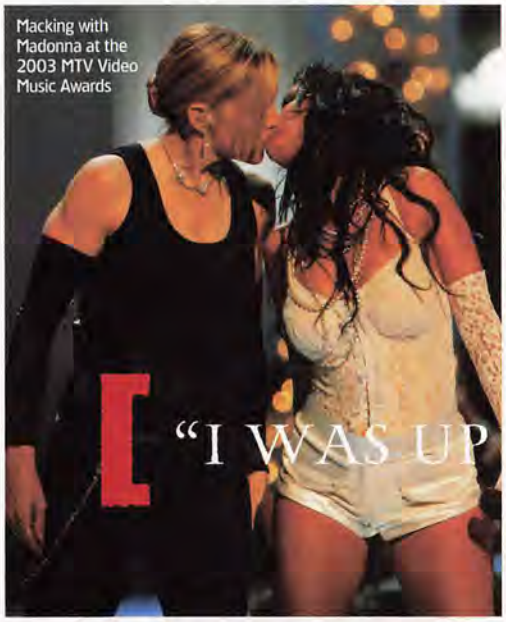
It is a little after 10 o'clock on a misty Tuesday night in September, high in the Hollywood Hills. Christina Aguilera's secluded home — opulent enough to suggest that her wealth is vast, her decorative taste eclectic and her love for scented candles boundless — is teeming with people on her payroll. The reason for tonight's gathering may be a little bizarre for everyday folk to appreciate, but such is the life of an international superstar.

Yesterday, *Blender*'s Woman of the Year dyed her hair from one shade of brunette to another. Consequently, the world's media want to see immediate photographic proof, so she has arranged for a photographer friend to record the evidence and then distribute it. *Blender* is led through the coterie of photographers, assistants, makeup artists, PRs, PAs and Aguilera's two constantly yapping dogs, Stinky and Chewy (both aptly named), for a welcoming handshake that is firmer than you might expect. "I'll be out in a little while," she coos. "Make yourself at home. Go for a tour of the house — it's a beautiful place."

She is not wrong. Set at the end of a tree-lined cul-de-sac, with movie stars' houses nearby, the Aguilera residence perfectly illustrates her career arc these past few years (her self-titled 1999 debut sold 8 million copies; her current album, *Stripped*, is 3 million high and rising). It is not huge, her place, but rather comfortably ample: three bedrooms, two living rooms, a kitchen, a basement screening room, a swimming pool, a waterfall. A framed photograph of two of her latest heroes, twentieth-century pop-art mavericks Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, adorns the wall. The lighting is set to ambient; the view from the garden — Los Angeles twinkling under the night sky — is cinematically seductive; and in the bathroom, the toilet paper is very soft.

"Nice, huh?" she says when she emerges from the bedroom a half-hour later. She is dressed — and we use that word loosely — in a small hooded dressing gown that stops a millimeter below her pubic bone. It reveals more flesh than it conceals, and every time she bends down to pick up her coffee cup, it falls open at the chest.

The first thing you notice about her in person is that she is prettier than photographs suggest. Up close, she looks less like Marilyn Manson and absolutely nothing like a porn queen. Mostly, she seems delicate, vulnerable and tiny. Her hands and feet are doll-like, her body slight. Later, when she boasts that she is proud of her womanly curves — as if, when she looks down, she sees Jennifer Lopez — your reaction is: *What* curves? God alone knows where that enormous voice comes from. More than anything else, she looks young. But the 22-year-old, candid and flamboyantly outspoken, sure talks like a grownup.



Macking with Madonna at the 2003 MTV Video Music Awards

"Before this year, I suffered in life. I'd been burned and hurt a hell of a lot, repeatedly. This was the year I finally grew into myself and became an adult. *Stripped* was all about me taking the reins and assuming full control of my career. I'm not an entertainer anymore. I am," she says, and here she pauses while she reaches for her coffee, allowing the pause to become pregnant with expectation, "an *artist*." She says all this while maintaining full eye contact that defies you to disbelieve her. Not once does she blink.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THE STORY OF Christina Aguilera's remarkable success is a story of resolve over adversity, talent over self-doubt and assless chaps over bare midriff.

Like Pink, Aguilera comes from a broken home, and to this day she carries the mental and physical scars of a violent father. A military man, Fausto Aguilera was posted all over the world, and for the first five years of his daughter's life, the family was stationed in Tokyo. The singer's sole memories of Japan are unpleasant ones: Dad beating Mom and, occasionally, beating her as well. Things got so bad that her mother took to sleeping with a canister of Mace under her pillow to use as protection. Whenever another fight began, young Christina would hide in her room and sing to her stuffed animals to drown out the shouts and screams.

"It's just the way I coped," she says. "I would hide under the bed, just singing and thinking to myself, 'One day, I'm going to get out of this and become a famous singer.' "

By the time she turned 6, her mother had filed for divorce and returned, with Christina and her younger sister, to the United States, settling in Pittsburgh. At age 12, Christina was a Mouseketeer alongside Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake. Five years later, with a modern pop classic — "Genie in a Bottle" — under her belt, she had fulfilled those early dreams.

"You'd think I'd be happy, right?" she says, the accompanying frown suggesting otherwise. "But I was playing a part dictated by my then manager and my record company. I hated who I was back then, and I knew if I was going to continue in this business, I had to do things for myself next time. *Stripped* had to be a truly experimental record and a true representation of me. I didn't care if I sold one or 1 million copies. It just had to be real."

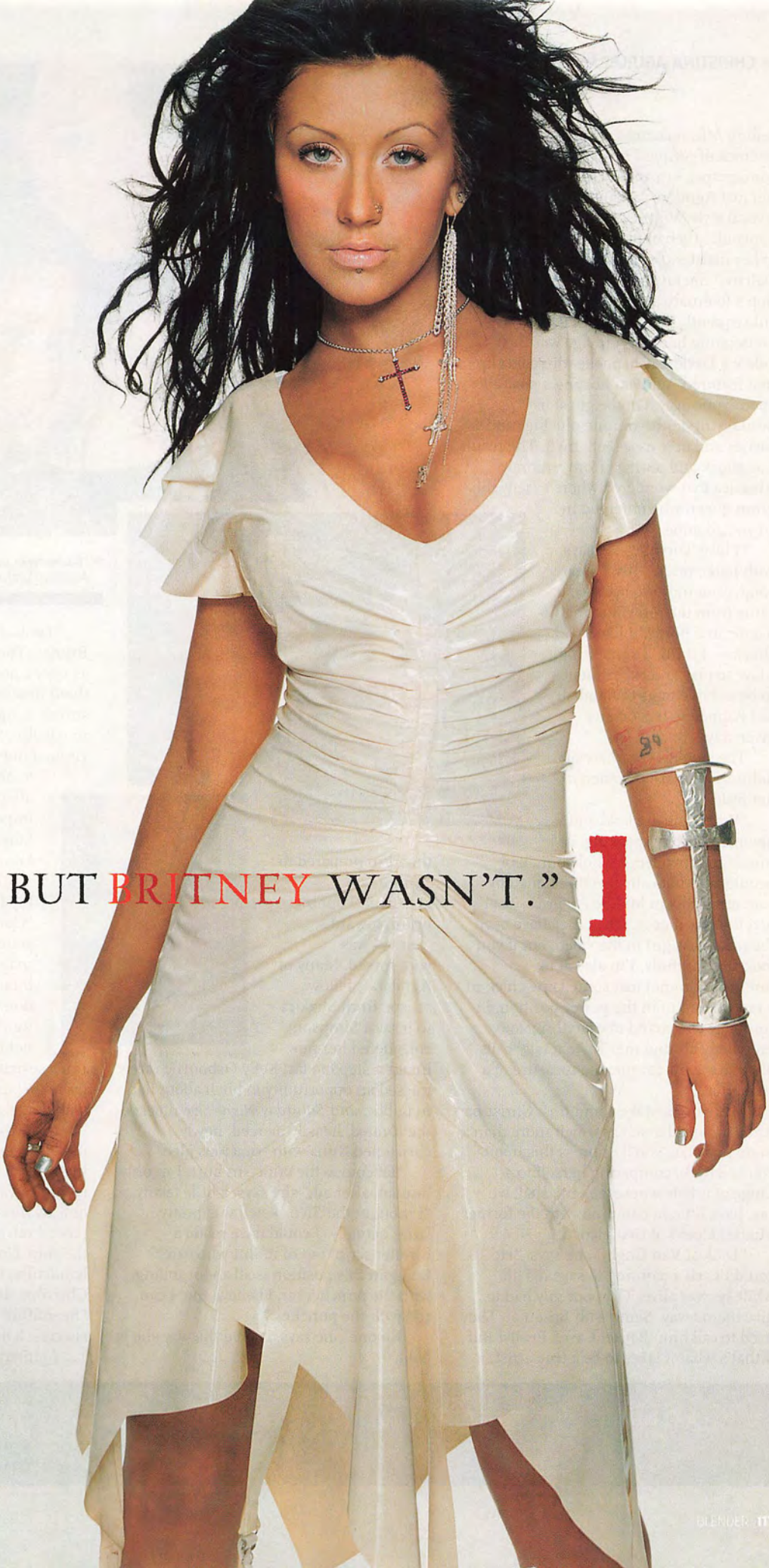
"I WAS UP FOR KISSING

Stripped is indeed real. It's also a stark, sometimes shocking, contrast to the pastel palette of her debut. It's an album of battle scars ("Fighter," about the father she has rarely seen since Tokyo; "Walk Away," about her ex-boyfriend Jorge Santos) and defiant self-belief ("Keep on Singin' My Song" and the lush "Beautiful," which goes, "I am beautiful no matter what they say/Words can't bring me down/So don't you bring me down today").

Tellingly, she enlisted the talents of former 4 Non Blonde frontwoman Linda Perry to help stage this radical reinvention, just as Pink had for the 5 million– →

Set design: Peter Gargagliano; styling: Trish Summerville for Caliente Beauty; makeup: Mathu Andersen for Margaret Maldonado Agency; hair: Davy Newkirk for Redkevcelestinreagency.com. This page: Kevin Kane/Wireimage.com. Opposite page: Judson Baker

Hey, now *that's* a wetsuit.



BRITNEY, BUT BRITNEY WASN'T."

EARRING BY **CHRISTIE MARTIN, L.A.**; CROSS NECKLACE FROM **MAXFIELD, L.A.**; CROSS CUFF BY **JELENA BEHREND STUDIO, N.Y.**; WHITE LATEX DRESS BY **GAELYN & CIANFARANI**

selling *M!ssundaztood*. The musical bedrock of *Stripped* is not teen-pop but soul, gospel, rap and rock, highlighting not just Aguilera's independent spirit but a vocal style Whitney Houston would applaud. Much of it is radio-friendly, but, at her insistence, its first single was "Dirrty," the raucous duet/clash with hip-hop's Redman, a song that would subsequently terrify radio. Further obliterating her PG-13 image was the video: a David LaChappelle–directed clip that featured Aguilera hosting a post-apocalyptic orgy. On the guest list? Sexually-up-to-the-minute plushies and furries and bare asses (oh, my!). The result was shock and outrage from a moral America that wondered where exactly the prom queen who emerged in 1999 had gone.

"I love 'Dirrty,' " she says with fierce pride. "It's a great song, even more so because it came from the girl who sang 'Genie in a Bottle.' I like to shock — I think it's inspiring. I love to play and experiment, to be as tame or as outlandish as I happen to feel on any given day."

The single's commercial failure, she insists, bothered her little.

"When you are bold and open, artistically speaking, in music and in video, a whole bunch of people automatically feel threatened by you, especially in Middle America. That's just the way it goes. OK, I may have been the naked-ass girl in the video, but if you look at it carefully, I'm also at the forefront. I'm not just some lame chick in a rap video; I'm in the power position, in complete command of everything and everybody around me. To be totally balls-out like that is, for me, the measure of a true artist."

Make no mistake about this: Christina Aguilera sees herself as much more than a mere pop star. She'll impress this upon you at length, comparing herself to a range of artists whose careers, shall we say, have little in common with the former Mouseketeer's at first glance.

"Look at Van Gogh," she says. "He couldn't sell a painting to save his life while he was alive. The poor guy had to give them away. Same with Basquiat. They used to call him 'Basket Case.' Really! But if that's what it takes to be a true artist, then I'm prepared to suffer."

↑ "But we never saw Uncle Walt's head!": Spears (left) and Aguilera (right) at the end of their *Mickey Mouse Club* run

Spears (left) and Aguilera, when they were best friends on *The Mickey Mouse Club*

As a blonde at the Radio Music Awards, 2000

Critical opprobrium toward "Dirrty" was widespread. Many of Aguilera's fellow artists, from Shakira to Jessica Simpson, considered her new image a step too far; Kelly Osbourne rarely missed an opportunity to bitch about her in public; and *Saturday Night Live* mocked the R-rated, heavily pierced, newly christened Xtina with voracious glee.

"Of course the criticism hurt. I'm only human, after all," she says, a little testily. "I thought the *SNL* sketch was pretty lame, actually. *I* could have made a funnier script out of it. But who cares? Being in this position is all about rolling with the punches, and believe me, I can roll with the punches."

No one, she says, is bold the way she is bold.

"Look at people like Beyoncé or Britney. They're desperate to come across as sweet, good little girls, but then you see them in photo shoots that are extremely sexual — tight little booty shorts, and not much else. So why do they try to be virginal in interviews?" She holds a finger to her mouth, Lolita-like, and affects a note-perfect Spears impersonation. " 'Oh, gosh, I haven't even kissed a boy in I don't know how long!' "

The finger drops away, and her top lip curls into an Elvis sneer. "Come on, girls, stop contradicting yourselves! If you want to do those magazine covers and those videos, then fine, more power to you. But don't revert to innocence afterward." She shakes her head. "I will not hide behind anything, ever. I'm a sexually strong female, and I'm proud to be one. If anyone has a problem with that, tough."

Nevertheless, the Xtina backlash did induce a certain amount of panic — if not in Aguilera herself, then certainly in her record company and management, who quickly hired the famously protective powerhouse PR firm PMK to help right the ship. Gone were the leather and handcuffs; in came a sweeter, more serene Christina. Her next single was the ballad "Beautiful." The result was a resounding success: a number 1 hit, relief all around.

Aguilera, however, strongly denies →

"I'M NOT AN ENTERTAINER ANYMORE. I AM... AN ARTIST."

✠

From top: WENN (2); Steve Granitz/WireImage.com

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any suggestion of an about-face.

" 'Beautiful' was always scheduled as the second single, because I thought it was a perfect contrast to 'Dirrty,' " she says. "It's a very vulnerable song, and I wanted to show that side of me. To suggest that it was rush-released to rescue my career . . . well, that's bullshit." She glowers. "Bullshit."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

CHRISTINA AGUILERA HAS a favorite word right now, one she employs with the frequency of an addict: *edgy*. It pops up in many of her conversations, sometimes with purpose, other times at will. She describes herself, for example, as an "edgy" artist, and she admires the "edgy" acting of Angelina Jolie. The reason she responded to Madonna's last-minute invitation to appear alongside her and nemesis Britney Spears at MTV's Video Music Awards back in August, meanwhile, was because it sounded — you guessed it — edgy. It turns out, however, that in the end the performance didn't quite live up to Aguilera's high expectations.

"The VMAs were so . . . so vanilla," she says. "So safe, so predictable, no edge. Apart from Madonna, Mary J. Blige and myself, I cannot think of another female performer who had her mic switched on.

Xtina confronts her fears of dolls, spiders and top hats.

HAT FROM CHA CHA'S HOUSE OF ILL REPUTE, N.Y. FEATHERS BY MOTHER PLUCKERS, L.A. NECKLACE BY VAMPIRE KISS BY VIOLA'S DEN, N.Y. CRESCENT MOON NECKLACE BY JOY RABATS LTD. OF BEVERLY HILLS. PIN FROM MAXFIELD, L.A. BRACELET BY HEART FROM RETAIL SLUT, L.A. CORSET BY YSL FROM MAXFIELD, L.A. BRA BY AGENT PROVOCATEUR. SHOES BY GIUSEPPE ZANOTTI

That is very disappointing to me. I agreed to do it in the first place only because Madonna had told me that it was mandatory to sing live."

Something palpable happens to Aguilera when she talks about Spears. She loses eye contact, focuses on her cuticles and grows visibly uncomfortable, as if wary of saying too much. But her dissatisfaction clearly needs a voice, and she duly gives it one. She suggests that although Spears sang live during rehearsals, when the show went on the air, she was lip-syncing.

"Who knows what happened, exactly," Aguilera says, sighing. "She was supposed to, but somewhere along the line. . . . I don't know. Maybe some money changed hands under the table? . . . " She trails off awkwardly, then changes tack. "I'd much rather just wash my hands of the whole nonsense, actually. These people aren't artists, they're just performers — fake and superficial, like the entire event. I'm very disappointed with MTV. Just look at the way they handled the kiss."

What she's referring to, of course, is *the kiss*. Mid-song, Madonna swapped saliva with both singers, diving into both mouths tongue-first. The following day, however, it was her smacker with Spears that made the front pages. Aguilera's barely got a mention.

"MTV didn't even screen my kiss properly — they cut away instead for ➔

DOGGY STYLE

CELEBRITY POOCHES!

What can you tell about rock stars from their canine companions? We asked pet behavioral counselor and advice columnist Charlotte Reed for some clues, and she threw us a bone

STAR **CHRISTINA AGUILERA**

DOG **STINKY**

OUR EXPERT SAYS "Papillons are quirky, unpredictable dogs, so an owner would need to have a lot of patience. Papillons are quite prissy and dainty, so anyone who owns one needs to be very much in touch with their feminine side."

STARS **GWEN STEFANI AND GAVIN ROSSDALE**

DOG **WINSTON**

OUR EXPERT SAYS "Pulis, or Hungarian sheepdogs, are protective guard dogs, so it takes commitment to forge a close relationship with one. They're intelligent but high-maintenance and need to be cleaned often — the owner is someone who wants a quiet companion with a deep spiritual bond."

STAR **DMX**

DAWGS **BANDIT AND BARBARA**

OUR EXPERT SAYS "You've got to be physically strong and dominant if you're going to control two pit bulls — they're challenging and not for submissive owners. It's a hip, urban dog, an extension of the urban lifestyle for someone who thinks he's bad just like the breed."

STAR **JENNIFER LOPEZ**

DOG **REINA**

OUR EXPERT SAYS "Not only are Chihuahuas popular now — they're small and perfect for traveling — but the Inca culture made the breed sacred. These dogs get cold easily and insist on being held constantly, so someone who needs companionship and who hates being alone would likely own one."

STAR **PINK**

DOG **FUCKER**

OUR EXPERT SAYS "Jack Russell terriers are disobedient, quick-tempered and strong-willed, so an owner would need to be just as stubborn in order to control or even keep up with the dog. You'd have to be a tenacious person."

STEVE KANDELL

Clockwise from top: Judson Baker; Jeffrey Mayer/Wireimage.com; Ramey Photo Agency; S. Gaboury/DMI/Rex USA; Splash News; Big Pictures USA

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APPETITE FOR REINVENTION

Do you know how to make over your image? Take *Blender's* simple quiz and find out!

1 **You and your friends are all members of the Mickey Mouse Club. You don't see much future in it, so you . . .**

a) Get a proper college education. At least it's something to fall back on.
b) Dress up as a Catholic schoolgirl and . . . *mmm* . . . Catholic schoolgirl. . . .
c) Join an apparently-not-gay all-male quintet.
d) Develop your already impressive singing voice and record a really good pop song.

2 **Everyone thinks you're a goody-two-shoes. So when you go to work on Monday, you . . .**

a) Undo the second button of your shirt.
b) Accessorize your outfit with a six-foot-long boa constrictor.
c) Shave off your lustrous head of curly hair.
d) Record a really good pop song and dress like a nineteenth-century courtesan.

3 **All of your teenage friends are getting a little boring. You want to hang out with an older crowd, so you . . .**

a) Start drinking in bars.
b) Start smoking in public and announce that you have, after all, lost your virginity.
c) Refashion yourself in the image of Michael Jackson circa 1982.
d) Record a really good pop song and dress like a twenty-first century ho.

4 **Finally, you want to become universally popular, so you . . .**

a) Make sure you remember everyone's birthday.
b) French-kiss Madonna in front of a global TV audience.
c) Start dating Cameron Diaz.
d) Record a really good pop song and . . . oh. How about dyeing your hair black?

IF YOU ANSWERED . . .

MOSTLY A): Sorry — you're going to have to try harder.

MOSTLY B): Your image is evolving comfortably. The kiss was a really nice touch.

MOSTLY C): Well done! It was the haircut that really did it.

MOSTLY D): Oh, yes! Congratulations — Uncle Walt must be spinning in his cryogenic sarcophagus! *ADAM HIGGINBOTHAM*

With boyfriend Jordan Bratman

← With Justin Timberlake at a pre-tour press conference: "Hey, look — I'm a Q-Tip!"

Justin [Timberlake's] reaction shot. How predictable — let's see the ex-boyfriend's response. Pathetic."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Spears and Aguilera's lips never came into contact.

"Actually, I was up for kissing Britney," Aguilera says, "but Britney wasn't. She was . . . she seemed very distant, even during rehearsals. Every time I tried to start a conversation with her — well, let's just say she seemed nervous the whole time. I wanted to reach out to her, because I feel she needs somebody in her life right now to help guide her."

And Aguilera — the woman who has just spent the summer on a joint tour with Timberlake — is ideal for the job?

"Well, I feel I've grown a lot this year, and we *did* used to be friends once, after all. She seems to me like a lost little girl, someone who desperately needs guidance. But who knows — maybe I'm not the right person to offer it. We're very different people, aren't we? In our world, there are different types of entertainers. You have your artists and you have your regular performers. I'm an artist, and, well. . . ."

> "BRITNEY SEEMS LIKE A LOST LITTLE GIRL WHO DESPERATELY NEEDS GUIDANCE."

As another sentence about Spears goes unfinished, she permits herself a private smile. Later, she will complain about the press insistently keeping the apparent rivalry alive, as if she herself plays no part in it. But she often seems to fan the flames.

Recently, Aguilera has done some modeling, first for her good friend Donatella Versace and now for Skechers, the same brand of sneakers Spears promoted two years ago. Presumably this is a coincidence?

"Absolutely!" she insists. "I don't do things based on what she does or doesn't do, you know. And anyway, she did some kind of roller-skating thing for them. I'm not planning on doing any of that kind of shit."

Instead, her ad campaign will have, she says firmly, "much more *edge* to it."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

LET US NOW leave the thorny subject of Britney Spears and move instead to happier topics. After the slow mending of her heart, broken last year by the aforementioned Jorge Santos, Aguilera is in love again, this time with a 25-year-old music management-company employee named Jordan Bratman. Reluctant to discuss any particular aspect of their life together, all she will say is that they are happy — very happy.

"He has an amazing spirit, and he is everything I need in my life right now. With him, my life is perfect." She smiles openly, and in doing so she resembles the girl she once was.

Her current satisfaction may have been hard-won, but it is undeniably deserved. In the past 12 months, Christina Aguilera has completed the most startling pop reinvention since Madonna's. That fact in itself is worthy of celebration, and so is this: Finally, her life has achieved some sort of peace.

"Things are good right now," she says, "and I have no regrets about anything in my life — even the stuff I went through with my father, because in many ways it made me who I am today." Her father recently wrote to her, congratulating her on her success and confessing to feelings of paternal pride. His daughter appreciated the sentiment, but she rules out any chance of a reunion.

"My father is really close to his brother, my uncle, who is basically this slimy scumbag who keeps trying to sell stories to the tabloids." Her face becomes rigid. "I've suffered too much hurt in my life to go back to that place again," she says. "I'm through being a victim." [BLENDER]

David Tazzyman (illustration); Ramey Photo Agency (in car); Arnold Turner/Wireimage.com (with Timberlake)

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Who doesn't like getting lumps of coal for Christmas? Us! Which is why we asked Simple Plan to help choose the perfect yuletide presents . . .

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2) PALM ZIRE 71
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3) CHAMPS
How to buy the new Adidas Superstar Feathers? *How?* Simply log on to *champssports.com* and find a Champs store near you. No, don't thank us. It's our job.

4) PHILIPS: PHILIPS KEY RING MP3 PLAYER
So petite you might need a trip to the optometrist before using the sucker, this MP3 player is also the only one on the market with a remote control built into its neck strap. *thingstodoyourthing.com*

6) BEN SHERMAN BEATLES CLOTHING LINE
Exploiting our love for the Beatles *and* wearing shirts, this latest clothing line from Ben Sherman boasts a variety of Fab Four-themed designs. Visit Virgin Megastores. *benshermanusa.com.*

7) TIVO
Fed up with your television dictating what you watch? Then you need TiVo, the gadget that puts you back in control with its ability to find and record your favorite shows. Visit *tivo.com* for more information.

Matthew Salacuse (Simple Plan), Alphonse Telymonde (all still-lifes)

8) 2004 NISSAN 350Z
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9) GIBSON LES PAUL SUPREME
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10) KENWOOD/SIRIUS SATELLITE HOME RECEIVER
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11) MOTOROLA V60p PHONE

The V60p is a mobile phone that can double as a walkie-talkie. Its contact list shows which of your contacts are available to Push-to-Talk and is the smallest of its kind in the CDMA market. *motorola.com*

12) NORELCO D-FINER RAZOR

Is it really important that your razor look cool? Probably not. So let's pass over the D-Finer's groovy design and concentrate on its unsurpassed ability to personalize your facial fuzz with ultra-close, precise lines. *norelco.com*

13) 50-INCH PUREVISION PLASMA TV
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14) FUNK FIGHTER
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18) ESTILO – PROSKATER
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19) ADIDAS MOVES
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Matthew Salacuse (Simple Plan); Alphonse Telymonde (all still-lifes)

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LUDACRIS
The Atlanta jester's poultry-themed third album is finger-lickin' crunk!
✪✪✪✪

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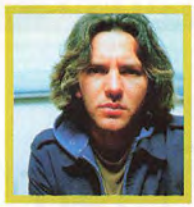
NO DOUBT
The verdict on Gwen Stefani's started-as-ska-then-blossomed hits collection!
✪✪✪✪



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✪✪✪✪

The Guide

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THEIR PISSED-OFF RETURN
✪✪✪

BLINK-182

Pop-punk heroes strip away their silly side on sixth album, p135

Clockwise from top left: Phil Mucci, Norman Ng/Celebrity Pix/Corbis Outline; Clay Patrick McBride/Retna Ltd.; Sye Williams/Corbis Outline

Not That Innocent

Now quite a woman, a pop superstar feels herself, literally and figuratively

BRITNEY SPEARS
IN THE ZONE

✪✪✪

JIVE

BRITNEY SPEARS DOESN'T have to pretend she's a virgin anymore, and on her fourth record, she takes full advantage of that freedom. The most loveable and still the biggest former teen-pop superstar almost can't help making music that is at least in some small way delightful. Though you can't tell it from the lackluster first single, "Me Against the Music," featuring her erstwhile makeout partner Madonna, *In the Zone* has its share of delights.

As *Stripped* was for Spears's fellow former Mouseketeer Christina Aguilera, this is a record of personal liberation. Spears has been in the news not only admitting to having sex, but also drinking, smoking, breaking up with Justin Timberlake and possibly hooking up with Fred Durst.

Appropriately, she has made a (literally) heavy-breathing record — the hard-candy, primary-color vocals of *. . . Baby One More Time* and *Oops! . . . I Did It Again* are rarely heard on these tracks. But when they are — on the Newish Wave "Brave New Girl," the album's most explicit declaration of independence — they're as zesty as ever. For the most part, however, Spears pants, moans and even raps over a smorgasbord of club beats, and there's absolutely no "oops" about what she's doing.

Furthermore, there's nothing ambiguous about what zone she's in: "I don't want to be a tease/Undo my zipper, please," she sings on "Showdown," one of the record's numerous lyrical references to her hips, her ass and her low-rise jeans. Spears is growing up, and if she's a little too abrupt about it in places — "We're going to the club to get crunk with Britney," the opening line of "(I Got That) Boom Boom," featuring the Ying Yang Twins, does not fall naturally on the ear — she does it with style and a lot of dirty giggling.

Spears sings lyrics about her hips, ass and low-rise jeans.

Two of the best tracks are the ones on which she takes the biggest musical risks. Listening to "Early Mornin'," an ode to 5 A.M. debauchery produced by electronica chrome-dome Moby, is like calling the Britney phone-sex line without a per-minute charge — a sensuous, swaying beat accentuated by a wash of strings that comes and goes like a slow inhalation. "Outrageous," an R. Kelly club number, has a hot, odd compulsion and lyrics that are practically big-pimpin', Spears-style: "Take trips around the globe/Tints on the Jeeps so nobody knows/It's so hot got ya comin' out of your clothes."

Stylistically, *In the Zone* recalls various stages of Madonna — there's a hint of "Oh, Father" on the better of the record's two ballads, "Shadow" (cowritten and produced by Avril Lavigne hitmakers the Matrix), and a little bit of *Erotica*'s sweaty, layered funk throughout.

As a career move, though, it's closer to Janet Jackson's *Control* — a transition from pop poppet to adult woman, living large and in charge. Because Spears was the biggest teen dream, she was also the one most saddled with the imperative of repeating commercial successes by repeating their formula — an up-tempo pop-and-ballad one-two punch coupled with a safe, coy, generous, videogenic appeal that together made her a superstar, with 26 million sales of her first three albums.

Unlike her parent-friendly past work, this is neither safe nor coy. "Breathe on Me" starts with Spears declaring that she's halfway there, and concludes with her letting her lover know he doesn't even have to touch her, he can just (in a reference to Lauren Bacall's career-making line in the World War II romantic thriller *To Have and Have Not*) put his lips together and blow. Both "Touch of My Hand" and "Girls and Boys" are about masturbation.

Spears has her hand not only on herself, but also to some extent on the wheel — she has cowriting credits on nine of the record's 13 tracks, which is, to do some fancy math, nine more than she had on her debut (as well as eight more than on her sophomore effort, and four more than on her previous release). Even more telling, she's no longer working with producers like Sweden's Max Martin, the type known for leaving little for the artist to do other than lay down her vocals.

This I'm-coming-out record is an unhesitant move from songs of the heart to songs of the groin, for which "I'm a Slave 4 U," the first single from her previous release, 2001's *Britney*, was a tentative test balloon. The girl who started her career looking up at you from her first album cover with a Crest-fresh smile and her knees together now has her legs open wide — and, on more than one occasion, something all her own between them. You can't get any more in control than that. No longer a girl, freed from slavery, now fully a woman, she makes a pretty convincing mistress. *MIM UDOVITCH*

BRITNEY SPEARS Her life in CDs →

. . . BABY ONE MORE TIME
JIVE, 1999
✪✪✪
With killer singles written by Swedes named Carlsson, Elofsson and Magnusson, a 16-year-old Louisianan innocently flirts with emerging hormones, playing a frustrated schoolgirl on the subtly morose title track.

OOPS! . . . I DID IT AGAIN
JIVE, 2000
✪✪✪
"I'm not that innocent," she chides on the great title hit, warning a boy and copping to her coquettishness. Even fusty Brit folkie Richard Thompson honored "Oops!", covering it on his album of the greatest songs of the last 10 centuries.

BRITNEY
JIVE, 2001
✪✪
With a moan and a slither, Spears sheds her teen-pop skin. "I'm not a girl, not yet a woman," she intones, but she sure sounds womanly on "I'm a Slave 4 U," crawling through the Neptunes' digital S&M dungeon. *JONAH WEINER*

This page: Pr. Snuggles (still-lifes, 3). Opposite page: Mary Ellen Mathews

"Hi, you've called
1-900-BRITNEY. To hear
me sing a suggestive lyric,
press 1 now. . . ."

2PAC

NU-MIXX KLAZZICS ✪

KOCH

Remix CD rings with the sound of the bottom of the barrel being scraped

The estate of the late Tupac Shakur has been stripped bare. The light bulbs have been snatched from the fridge. The toilet water has been siphoned, bottled, auctioned off. How else to explain this cheap cut-and-paste job, which lays the vocal tracks from 10 2Pac hits over new beats? Beyond-the-grave remixes don't have to be crappy — look at "The Realest Killas," 50 Cent's excellent 2003 'Pac mix-tape "duet" — but the budget-funk beats here aren't even trying. Once chillingly spare, "Hail Mary" gets stupid string stabs and wind whooshes, while this version of "2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted" replaces Snoop Dogg with no-name barkers. To paraphrase 'Pac's rival Biggie: mo' money, mo' crappy posthumous CDs. *JONAH WEINER*

THE SCORE >>

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✪✪✪ GOOD IN ITS GENRE

✪✪ JUST OK

✪ WEAK

CLAY AIKEN

MEASURE OF A MAN ✪✪

RCA

Jug-eared balladeer from North Carolina sanitizes Top 40 pop

Show a little pity for 12-year-old girls. Five years ago, when their older sisters first got that funny feeling in their underpants, Backstreet Boys and 'N Sync were there like so much teen Kotex to absorb that first blush of womanhood. But now, with Britney Spears reaching for her vibrator and Justin Timberlake peeping on his showering ex, who can Ashley (and her mom) listen to on her way to soccer? Enter Clay Aiken, the milk-white *American Idol* runner-up, whose debut album may be the unhippest, unedgiest, unthreateningest record to hit number 1 in 40 years. Unlike Backstreet and 'N Sync, Aiken is practically defiant in his disinterest in contemporary, black-dominated pop; he ee-*nun*-see-ates each treacly word as if he's auditioning for the community-theater lead in *Les Mis*. It's only on the voyeuristic single, "Invisible," that things gets interesting. "If I was invisible," he sings, "then I could just watch you in your room." *Mommmy!* *CRAIG MARKS*

AVENGED SEVENFOLD

WAKING THE FALLEN ✪✪✪✪

HOPELESS

The next AFI? Warped Tour vets mine goth-metal gold

Vintage heavy metal T-shirts have become a fashion staple uniting freaky divas and sullen emo hipsters, but the SoCal punk quintet Avenged Sevenfold are the rare outfit to wear '80s metal like they mean it. For their second album, the black-clad lads team up with Godsmack producer Mudrock to synthesize a decade's worth of pop, thrash and technical-minded metal mania into an outsize, orchestral epic full of pretension, from the band members' goofy horror-film handles to the disc's 14-minute centerpiece, the intricately gorgeous "I Won't See You Tonight." Guitarists Synyster Gates and Zacky Vengeance enact balletic dual-lead dogfights that echo Iron Maiden without a hint of irony, while frontman M. Shadows chases them through the cemetery with love songs from beyond the grave, deploying some of the most alluring shrieks and gurgles since Mike Patton's Faith No More days. It's an inspired mix of old and nü, Pennywise bubble-thrash and gothic Eurometal. *CARLY CARIOLI*

Avenged Sevenfold: Kneel before the might of their, er, nail polish.

BABY BASH

THA SMOKIN' NEPHEW ✪

UNIVERSAL

Baby-faced Latino MC from Houston saves all his charm for the single

Don't trust Baby Bash, ladies. If he treats you like he treats songwriting, he'll be doing five other girls before

KILL YOUR BANJO

Alt-country scamp leaves the little leagues behind

RYAN ADAMS

ROCK N ROLL ✪✪✪✪✪

LOST HIGHWAY

>> A NICHE IS a rut, whichever way you cut it, and Ryan Adams always seemed too ambitious for the humble world of alt-country. His last album, *Gold* — which had echoes of the Rolling Stones, Elton John, even the White Stripes — hinted that his days as a travel-size Steve Earle were drawing to a close.

He has proved it with a pulsating commercial rock record, audibly inspired by Nirvana, Hüsker Dü, U2, Oasis and the Psychedelic Furs, with a thrilling, just-minted feel that makes it rather more than a flip through Winona Ryder's record collection.

Whether lost, lonely, hoarse, drugged or horny (mainly horny), over volleys of his own peeved punk guitars, *Rock N Roll* bolsters Adams's image as a lover, not a fighter. His latest squeeze, Parker Posey, cowrites and co-sings "Note to Self: Don't Die," an impish take on the rock star's eternal crisis ("Note to self: Don't change for anyone") with an aptly Nirvana-like riff.

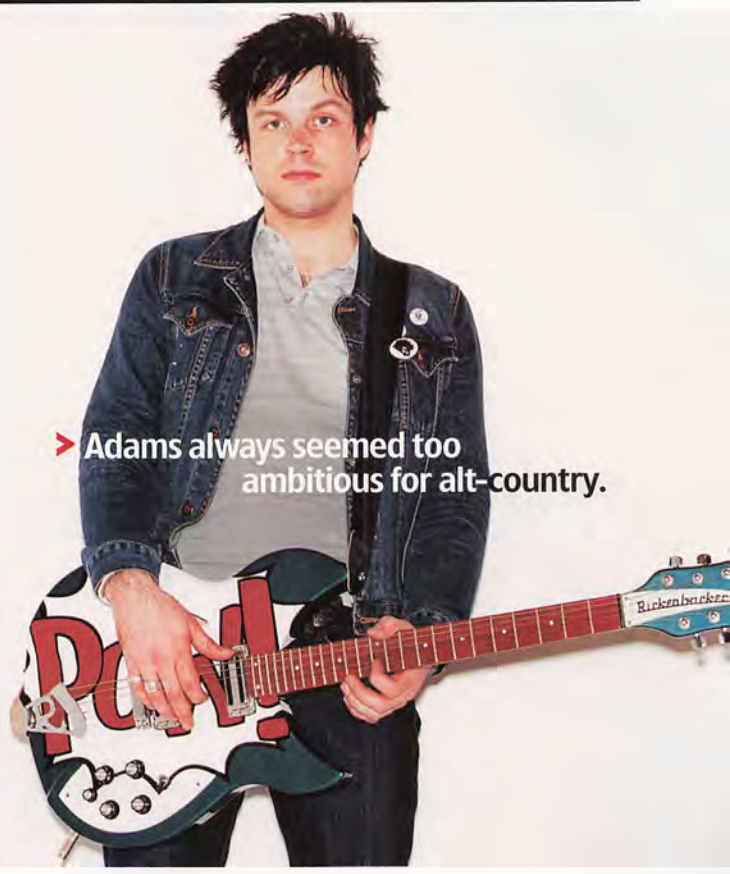
Here's sad Ryan, missing a girl in the schizoid "Wish You Were Here"; here he is bored of her in the tart, New Wavey "Burning Photographs." There he is again, as romantically bereft as Morrissey on the tenderly jangling "Anybody Wanna Take Me Home," then overtaken by lust on the boogie-licious "Shallow." Great songs all, but the clincher is "This Is It," a high-octane ode of adoration riding a chorus like a Saturn V rocket, with Adams's declaration that "I kiss her on her teeth, *mmmm*" lending a quirky ring of truth to a tune destined to soundtrack a thousand heavy-petting sessions.

Once upon a time, there was a talented songwriter with an attention-deficit problem. With *Rock N Roll*, Ryan Adams has thrown off the trappings of underachievement and grabbed for the crown. *TONY POWER*

RYAN ADAMS'S CURRENT LISTENING

>> JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE *JUSTIFIED JIVE*

>> THE STROKES *ROOM ON FIRE RCA*



you've been dating a month. The man can't settle down, his lyrics make clear, and his debut has commitment problems with musical styles, too. Here he is, blandly speed-rapping over half-baked Dirty South bounce on "Yeh Suh!", fumbling for melancholy profundity over a misplaced alt-rock riff on "Pollution," then weed-lusting and aping Sublime on "Early in the Morning." It's clear his true love here is the hit single "Suga Suga," which manages to be zipper-bustingly horny and aw-shucks sweet at the same time. It's boosted by a smooth Frankie J cameo, the best R&B catcall of the year ("Suga, how you get so *flyyy*"), and a deliciously knotted acoustic guitar lick.

JONAH WEINER

BENT

THE EVERLASTING BLINK ✪✪✪

GUIDANCE

U.K. duo's second LP chills out, goes quietly mental

Somewhere between the silky, soul-infused sounds of Zero 7 and Air and the sample-mania of DJ collective the Avalanches, Bent have custom-built a couch all their own. The Nottingham, England, duo's debut, *Programmed to Love*, resuscitated Nana Mouskouri, the European Barbra Streisand, but it lacked further highlights. *The Everlasting Blink*, though, is witty where the Avalanches get sophomoric, surprising where Z7 turn sleepy. It flaunts the kind of perspicacity that most down-tempo records de-emphasize — Bent make memorable hooks from interlocking samples of Hawaiian guitars, seamlessly blend Country-Western and bossa nova beats, and this time select David Essex, singer of the '70s glam-rock dazzler "Rock On," for Tarantino-style rehabilitation. Quirky is easy. Quirky and soulful, tougher. Quirky, soulful and leaning toward pop songs? Impressive.

JAMES HANNAHAM

THE BLACK-EYED SNAKES

RISE UP! ✪✪✪

CHAIRKICKERS MUSIC

Primitive blues turned into evil boogie, heavy on the distortion

WEIRDO ALT-ROCK

Alan Sparhawk of quietest-band-on-the-planet Low has an alter ego: As "Chicken Bone" George, he fronts the Black-Eyed Snakes, a grungy riposte to Canned Heat. The idea is to unite the rudiments of Chicago blues (fast shuffle-blues jams with snarling slide guitar and harmonica) with the timbres of late-'80s Midwestern indie-rock: everything scraped and distorted straight to hell, drums in your face.

Bon Jovi's tour of secluded lawns was an unmitigated disaster.

Songs are secondary in all this — the pleasures of the Snakes' second album are almost entirely textural. But the comedy shtick stops with the band's pseudonyms, thankfully (the only other joke here is covering both '50s hambone-beat legend Bo Diddley and arty '90s bludgeoners the Swans), and extended boogie grooves like "No Good Daddy" abrade just like they should.

DOUGLAS WOLK

BON JOVI

THIS LEFT FEELS RIGHT ✪

ISLAND

Jersey guys shoot their greatest hits through the heart — unplugged

Bon Jovi may specialize in anthems, but they can also thrive in stripped-down environments — the blazing Jon-and-Richie acoustic version of "Wanted Dead or Alive" at the 1989 VMAs inspired MTV to start the *Unplugged* series. Why, then, have Bon Jovi dragged some of their best-known songs into the open-mic Night of the Damned? The intricate guitar on the verses of "Wanted" is buried here by a stomping, monotone string line; Jon appropriates a carton-a-day rasp on the bloozy reworking of "You Give Love a Bad Name"; and "Livin' on a Prayer" is a hushed, overwrought duet with Olivia d'Abo — the actress wife of producer Pat Leonard — as Gina. Trading anthemic choruses for cellos and brushes is a risky move for the one rock band that can still sell out arenas. But *This Left Feels Right* just gives the whole unplugged concept a bad name.

MAURA JOHNSTON

I LOVE THIS CD!

SIMEON RICE
TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS DEFENSIVE END

SADE
STRONGER THAN PRIDE
EPIC

"It's classic mood music. It gives me a good temperament, and it helps me think."

THE BOTTLE ROCKETS

BLUE SKY ✪✪✪✪

SANCTUARY

Midwestern roots-rockers return to sharp form on seventh album

Thirty seconds into the first album of new Bottle Rockets songs in four years, Brian Henneman revs from acoustic-and-harmonica to full-band hook as he delivers a punch line in his plain, twangy Missouri drawl: "I fell down so here I lay/Got the workman's comp, so everything's OK." That's their signature: good tunes Americana-style, driving home everyday details few songwriters notice. Although produced by Allman Brothers guitarist Warren Haynes, they rock less these days, with folk tinges aplenty. But not since 1995's *The Brooklyn Side* has their material been quite this sharp. And if they can occasionally be corny — "Men & Women" could have come straight off the Nashville production line — the song about how September 11 compelled lovers to kiss at the baggage claim has their name on it.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DA BAND

TOO HOT FOR TV ✪

BAD BOY

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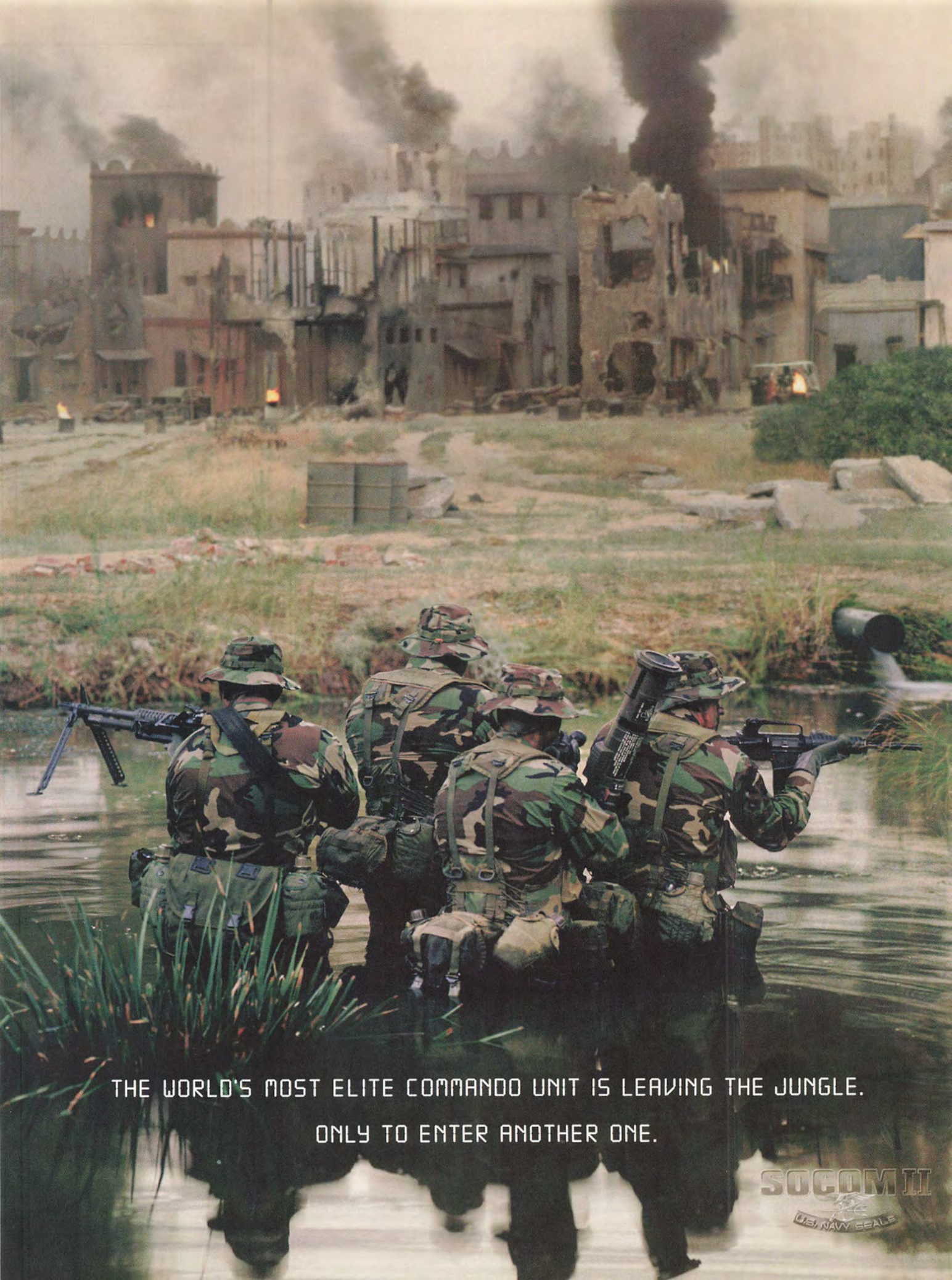
Opposite page, from top: Lisa Johnson; Kenneth Cappello. This page, from top: Mark Seliger; Al Messerschmidt/WireImage.com


THE WORLD'S MOST ELITE COMMANDO UNIT IS LEAVING THE JUNGLE.
ONLY TO ENTER ANOTHER ONE.
SOCOM II
U.S. NAVY SEALS

milk their battles for a reality TV series. It takes a much more cynical quality to treat them like a giant game of Whac-a-Mole, beating them into an album as sullen and lifeless as this. Onscreen, Puffy's *Making the Band 2* is addictive: the choking fistfights between Philly baller/brawler Ness and gruff Frederick, the lazy work ethic of crunkateer Young City and rasta Dylan, the sympathy we felt for focused singer Sara Stokes. On record, there's no drama or personality. Every track (aside from the boisterous hit "Bad Boy This, Bad Boy That") is constructed so no one outshines the others — so no one shines at all. Result? Too cold for your stereo.
ANDY GREENWALD

HOWIE DAY

STOP ALL THE WORLD NOW ✪✪✪

EPIC

Maine minstrel aims to succeed Dave Matthews and John Mayer

His second album might feature a 25-piece orchestra and glistening British-rock sheen from producer Youth (Crowded House, the Verve), but Howie Day hasn't betrayed his coffeehouse folk roots. Like all good singer-songwriters, he still prizes sincerity over all things — including, say, originality. This approach can work: The running-down-the-corridors positivity of the lead single, "Perfect Time of Day," has been heard a million times before, especially on U2 B-sides, and it still does the job. But when he starts breathily pining over the memory of an ex's summer dress in a downpour ("Sunday Morning"), fatigue sets in — when did heartbreak get so orthodox? "It's all a little bit strange," he croaks on the textbook ballad "End of Our Days." Yes, but not that strange.
STEVE LOWE

FEFE DOBSON

FEFE DOBSON ✪✪✪

ISLAND

Eighteen-year-old Toronto native makes an album of good, unclean fun

Fefe Dobson says she grew up pretending to be Kurt Cobain and Judy Garland, tortured singers separated by a generation. Her producer and cowriter, Jay Levine, apparently grew up pretending to work with Blink-182, Pink and the Knack. That's a good thing for Dobson. Her first single, "Take Me Away," is chewy, forceful power-pop. The *nyeah-nyeah* power chords of "Bye Bye Boyfriend," the nü-metal aggro of "Unforgiven" and the straightforward, unreconstructed punk bounce of "Stupid Little Love Song" are equally suckable ear candy. On the latter, Dobson sounds so authentically Ramones-ish, she practically has a Queens accent. This effortlessly catchy debut proves that in the wake of Christina Aguilera's *Stripped* and Pink's *M!ssundaztood*, young female singers no longer have to wait for their second album to make a bad-girl record.
MIM UDOVITCH

ELEPHANT MAN

GOOD 2 GO ✪✪✪

VP

Loony dancehall toaster: Sean Paul crossed with Ronald McDonald

Sometimes a genre as inscrutable as dancehall reggae needs an over-the-top comedian to bridge the culture gap. With that in mind, consider Elephant Man the Jamaican Carrot Top, except funny. An unpredictable performer with a penchant for flamboyant outfits and even more eccentric rhymes, Elephant is among the poppiest of the island's exports, given his tendency toward the sugary hijacking of familiar melodies and hooks. "Fan Dem Off Wine" riffs off Survivor's "Eye of the Tiger," and "Good 2 Go" reimagines Michael Jackson's "Smooth Criminal" as a plea for sexual gratification. He's even better when less hinged, as on the sultry single "Pon De River Pon De Bank" and at the end of ➜

Never let Blink-182 choose their own wedding outfits.

NO DUMMIES

San Diego pop-punkers drop the fart jokes, get pissed off

BLINK-182

BLINK-182 ✪✪✪✪

GEFFEN

FOR FIVE STUDIO albums, Blink-182 were punks the way Bart Simpson is a punk. Their rebellion began in the kitchen, fighting with parents, and ended a skateboard ride away at the mall, mooning security guards. Did they want to put a steel toe through a cop's face? Nah. Pee in a Snapple bottle and trick him into drinking it? Very much. But by the end of the episode, they were always sweet, happy kids. Like rock's best storytellers, they elevated the ordinary into myth, freezing skate-park pratfalls and awkward first dates nostalgically and poignantly so they could hold on to them forever.

On their new album, they return from a two-and-a-half-year break sad and angry. Guitarist Tom DeLonge's riffs are heavier, *nastier*, but still catchy, and he and bassist-singer Mark Hoppus seethe and bark as much as they sing. Family strife and indifferent, threatening girls still dominate the lyrics, but the emotional range has narrowed: Obsessive attention to detail and smell-my-finger goofiness have been jettisoned, giving way to charged, chewed-off refrains.

On "Violence" and "Feeling This," DeLonge twists his likeable punk-brat singsong into a frayed shout — not screamo, but close. The result is a lean, thrilling run through adolescent hopelessness.

From 1997's breakout "Dammit" to the 2001 hit "First Date," Blink have been twentysomethings struggling to keep their childhoods from slipping away — when all else fails, they've found the fountain of youth between their legs, railing off dick jokes. Here they stay wistful, but their smiles have turned to glares. Bart Simpson has been in the same fourth-grade class for over a decade — Blink-182 have found a new, angrier way to never leave junior high. *JONAH WEINER*

TOM DeLONGE'S CURRENT LISTENING

- **VENDETTA RED** BETWEEN THE NEVER AND THE NOW *EPIC*
- **BRAND NEW** DEJA ENTENDU *RAZOR & TIE*

George Lange/Corbis Outline

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the vicious "Nah Bow," where his vocals degenerate into spitfire nonsense scatting, a jester-like language even more universal than the pop mash-up.
JON CARAMANICA

BETH GIBBONS AND RUSTIN MAN

OUT OF SEASON ✪✪✪

SANCTUARY

Portishead singer's side project: heavy on torches, short on songs

To fill the six-year gap since Portishead's last foray into film-noir trip-hop, vocalist Beth Gibbons has paired with ex-Talk Talk electropop bassist Paul Webb (a.k.a. Rustin Man) for the haunting, ephemeral *Out of Season*. Gibbons is that rare British singer, like Annie Lennox and PJ Harvey, who can sing like she owns the blues, and Webb sets her quivery voice elegantly in minor keys swaddled by strings, acoustic basses and guitars — and, on the downright spooky "Spider Monkey," a toy piano. Siphoning mojo from jazz-soul queen Nina Simone and art-rock atmospherist David Sylvian, *Out of Season*'s usefulness as ambience almost trumps its self-importance and paucity of standout material. Gibbons could sing a telemarketing pitch backed by Webb, and hipsters would still probably shag to it.
JAMES HANNAHAM

JEAN GRAE

THE BOOTLEG OF THE BOOTLEG EP ✪✪✪

BABYGRANDE/ORCHESTRA

Next Big Thing rapper drops a six-song EP with World's Longest Bonus Track

After seven-plus years spitting her way through the NYC underground, 26-year-old MC Jean Grae is pissed she isn't famous yet: "Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you," goes the catchy chorus of "Hater's Anthem." Elsewhere on this EP (capped by a 45-minute hidden track, where she rhymes over hijacked hits from Eminem and Jay-Z), the syntax gets more complex, but the sentiment remains the same. Bitch-slapping the music industry and other MCs, Grae is inventive and funny but remains pissed. "I'm raising the barrel/Envisioning marrow/Splashed on the wall and polka-dotting all my apparel," she rhymes on the suicidal "Take Me," accompanied by gospel background pleas for deliverance. Self-destruction hasn't sounded this good since *The Slim Shady LP*.
G. BEATO

Hatebreed live for their morning squint.

AL GREEN

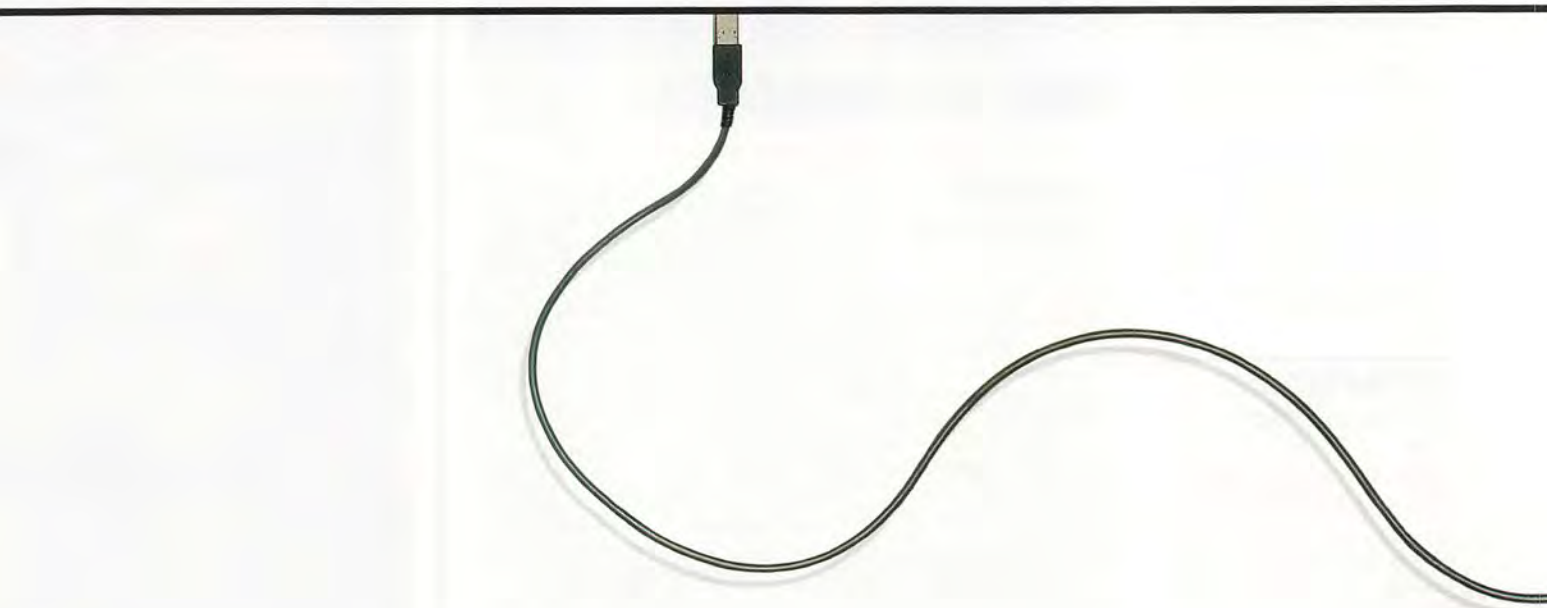
I CAN'T STOP ✪✪

BLUE NOTE

Memphis soul giant makes a monumentally unnecessary record

What the right Reverend Al Green attempts here is something close to a miracle: He wants to turn back the clock to 1976, when he and producer Willie Mitchell released the last of a series of albums that made Green a star. Subsequently, he recorded some R&B without Mitchell and eventually gave up pop music, becoming a minister and recording Grammy-winning gospel records. For his secular comeback, Green and Mitchell have rounded up most of the musicians from his landmark early-'70s records, and even Green's favorite hitmaking microphone. Sadly, though, *I Can't Stop* is a weak

Courtesy of Universal Records



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echo of those gloriously clean and spacious LPs. Green's voice, truly a gift from God, is still agile and emotive, but the writing and arranging are as dated as a Betamax tape. Failing to recapture the elegance and simplicity of songs like "Tired of Being Alone" and "Love and Happiness," Green and Mitchell make clear only how wondrous their early collaborations were. With luck, the Rev. Green will continue to embrace secular soul and hook up with the Roots, the Neptunes or even the devilishly gifted R. Kelly.

NELSON GEORGE

ASTONISHING FACT! >>
During a 2000 Metallica show, **HATEBREED** bassist Chris Beattie brawled with Giants Stadium security and was banned for life!

JOSH GROBAN

CLOSER ✪✪✪

REPRISE

Puzzlingly huge vocal star makes the CD equivalent of *Riverdance*

Because he has a big, well-trained voice and often sings in Italian with orchestral accompaniment, 22-year-old Josh Groban is lumped in with pop-operatic singers Andrea Bocelli and Charlotte Church. But he's actually more a throwback to such Broadway heartthrobs as Robert Goulet, parlaying pretty-boy looks and an ultra-masculine baritone into a swoon-inducing juggernaut that so far includes a double-platinum debut and a hit PBS special. *Closer* (which is not named after the Nine Inch Nails song) should do even better. "You Raise Me Up," which manages to evoke both "Wind Beneath My Wings" and "Amazing Grace," is an obvious MOR smash — all that's missing is the Céline Dion cameo. But there's enough Celtic and worldbeat flavor (courtesy of Deep Forest's Eric Mouquet) to spice up the cheesy excess and make *Closer* surprisingly palatable.

J.D. CONSIDINE

HATEBREED

THE RISE OF BRUTALITY ✪✪✪

UNIVERSAL

Headbanger's Ball host keeps day job, revs up the thrash

Hatebreed frontman Jamey Jasta's side gig hosting MTV2's hive of heavitude hasn't civilized him much: His band's new disc crams twice the guttural riffage and glottal rage as your average *Headbanger's Ball* episode in half the time. On Hatebreed's first disc since slimming down to a four-piece, guitarist Sean Martin's streamlined chainsaw-stutter riffs carve bitter anthems out of agony on standout tracks like the Slayer-meets-Biohazard scorcher "Another Day, Another Vendetta," while Jasta plays the raving vigilante over a cavernous subway rumble. On the best songs, Jasta draws inspiration, instead of just blood, from his pain: "If you don't live for something/You'll die for nothing," he barks on "Live for This." Hatebreed were the biggest-selling band on indie Victory Records before inking with Universal for last year's *Perseverance*, but don't expect them to become Good Charlotte. Without a hint of melody to put wind in their sales, this is still a gang only Iann Robinson's peeps could love.

CARLY CARIOLI

I LOVE THIS CD!

JASON BIGGS
STAR OF *ANYTHING ELSE* AND *JERSEY GIRL*

JANE'S ADDICTION
STRAYS
CAPITOL

"I usually get recommendations from my friends while in their car. 'This is the new Jane's Addiction?' 'Yeah, you gotta get it.' And I get it."

HEY MERCEDES

LOSE CONTROL ✪✪✪

VAGRANT

Milwaukee pop-punkers make a big but controlled noise

Like most contemporary don't-call-us-emo rockers, Hey Mercedes leash their passions more tightly than they once did. Titling their second album *Lose Control* may even be a gentle swipe at fans who gripe that the quartet isn't as fervent as Braid, the former home of three of the four Mercedians. Produced by alt-rock specialists Sean Slade and Paul Q. Kolderie (Hole, Radiohead), the album is polished but far from pacified. The galloping, trebly plaints "Lashing Out" and "Quality Revenge at Last" are nearly as breathless as vintage Hüsker Dü, if less cacophonous. The band's principal limitation is not lack of fire but a style that has become commonplace in this Jimmy Eat World.

MARK JENKINS

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Wyclef Jean, bummed that his favorite Toby Keith song isn't on the jukebox

RONALD ISLEY

HERE I AM: RONALD ISLEY SINGS BURT BACHARACH ✪✪

DREAMWORKS

Veteran R&B vocalist lets us down easy with a solo set of too-easy listening

Despite being an old white guy born in Kansas City, Burt Bacharach often proves a sure thing for soul singers. Black-music greats Aretha Franklin ("I Say a Little Prayer"), Luther Vandross ("A House Is Not a Home") and Dionne Warwick ("Walk on By") have found gold, musically and literally, transforming his elegant, twisty syncopations. Alas, when Ronald Isley, titular head of R&B dynasty the Isley Brothers, takes on Bacharach standards, his distinctive tenor gets stuck in schmaltz: Too-slick backing makes this more MOR than magical. Two efforts, however, transcend pap. "The Look of Love," definitively assayed by Dusty Springfield in the late '60s, gets a mystical, almost trip-hop reading; Isley also inhabits "Close to You" (best known as covered by the Carpenters) with haunted passion. Otherwise, there's not much here to sing about.

MATT DIEHL

WYCLEF JEAN

THE PREACHER'S SON ✪✪✪

CLEF/J RECORDS

Hip-hop troubadour pleads "stop the violence," praises . . . stepfathers?

For former Fugees frontman Wyclef Jean, no musical idea is too ridiculous, whether it involves the Bee Gees' disco standard "Stayin' Alive," Nashville crooner Kenny Rogers or wrestling icon The Rock. A talented tunesmith who adapts any number of global genres, Jean's histrionic singing and simplistic lyrics can intensify his material (2000's über-dramatic "911," with Mary J. Blige) or derail it via self-parody (much of 2002's confused *Masquerade*). On *The Preacher's Son*, he's savvy enough to work it with Missy Elliott ("Party to Damascus"), mine the lite Latin grooves that revitalized Carlos Santana ("Me and My Guitar") and trade Slick Rick interpolations with Monica over jingling fretwork courtesy of U2's the Edge ("Class Reunion"). But "Baby Daddy" is an incongruous homage to stepfatherdom, including an embarrassing exhortation to "do the stepfather dance," and "Who Gave the Order" is overwrought with labored Bob Marley affectations. The album-opening "Industry" is a heartfelt, platonic vision of peace among beefing rappers, proving how endearing Jean can be when he avoids theatrics.

CHAIRMAN MAO

J-LIVE

ALWAYS WILL BE ✪✪✪

FAT BEATS

Smarty-pants New York rapper/English teacher leaves the classroom, stays off the street

J-Live — who taught eighth-grade English to make ends meet when his 2001 major-label deal fell through — is a backpack professor whose class you'd never cut. On his third album, quick, conversational rhymes and scratched-up, pounding beats freshen the 27-year-old's indie-hop values (headphone introspection trumps dance-floor exuberance on "Walkman Music," and getting by trumps getting rich on "Deal Widit"). Meanwhile, the frenetic, whistling loop on "Always Will Be" and the cleverly self-deprecating "Car Trouble" are as carefree as any radio jam. "Damn, it feels good to not have to be a gangsta," he sighs over the chattering high-hats and horn punches of "Get Live." This guy even makes *pacifism* sound cool.

NICK CATUCCI

TOBY KEITH

SHOCK'N Y'ALL ✪✪

DREAMWORKS

Hillbilly hitmaker brings Bill O'Reilly rhetoric to country radio

Toby Keith seems to extend an olive branch at the beginning of his ninth album. "I Love This Bar" is a lusty rocker about his favorite spot, a dive ➔

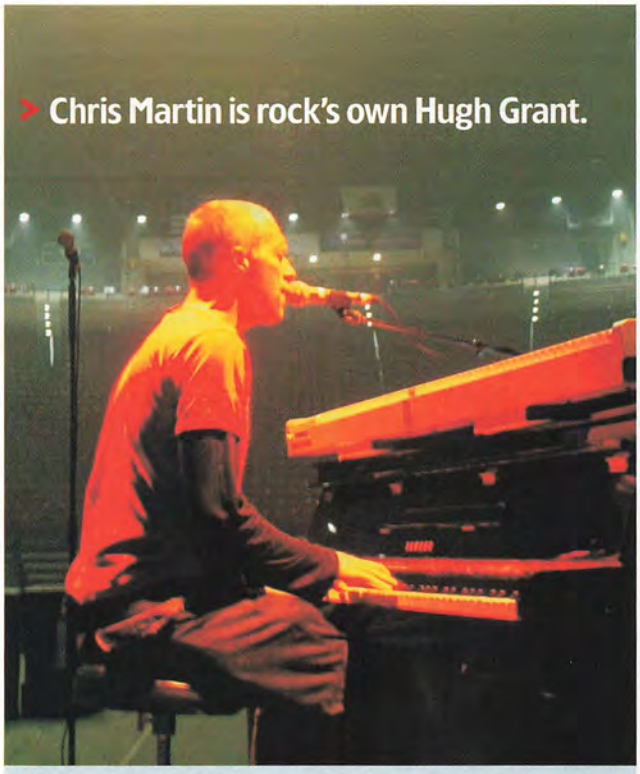
I LOVE THIS CD!

JACK BLACK
STAR OF *SCHOOL OF ROCK* AND *ENVY*

QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE
SONGS FOR THE DEAF
INTERSCOPE

"It's just the hardest-rocking and best song-writing in rock & roll music right now."

From top: Marc Baptiste; Theo Wargo/WireImage.com



> Chris Martin is rock's own Hugh Grant.

IVORY POWER

British rock's saviors caught Down Under in all their glory

COLDPLAY

LIVE 2003 ✪✪✪

CAPITOL

ALTHOUGH A greatest-hits set, even in live form, from a band with just two studio albums is a little premature, Coldplay have plenty of reason to celebrate their global ascent. In 1999, four college graduates, having journeyed up to London from various points of southern England, hit the fast-forward button. Their second single, "Yellow," was a huge hit, firing 4 million worldwide sales of their debut album, *Parachutes*.

Grammy and MTV awards ensued for the follow-up, *A Rush of Blood to the Head*; Coldplay became rock spokesmen for Oxfam's Make Trade Fair campaign; and, as lead singer Chris Martin was photographed (and photographed and photographed) with actress Gwyneth Paltrow, he "achieved" a sort of true celebrity status.

Irrespective of the tabloid coverage he loathes, Martin remains an uncommonly graceful singer in a terrific band. On this 12-track CD (plus an accompanying DVD), recorded last July in Sydney, Australia, Coldplay sound confident, proud and magisterial. It's difficult to believe none of them is older than 25. Like U2, they are hugely skillful manipulators of melancholy, and much of the material here — "Clocks," "Shiver," "Trouble" — is toweringly seductive in a live arena.

It's not all ballads, though: "In My Place" chimes celestially, the new track "Moses" is disarmingly vigorous and the 9/11-inspired "Politik" is positively aggressive, the closest this (mostly) quaint English quartet will come to resembling Rage Against the Machine. Martin's between-song banter — affable, humble, endlessly apologetic — confirms him as music's own Hugh Grant, and on "The Scientist," the apex of his aching sensitivity, you can practically hear him buckle with emotion. It's something he's very good at.

The finest moment here is also the most amusing: the sound of several thousand Australians hijacking "Yellow" and singing it back to the band in vowel-mangling fashion, rendering Martin momentarily silent — not in horror, it seems, but in awe. *NICK DUERDEN*

CHRIS MARTIN'S CURRENT LISTENING

- **ELBOW** **CAST OF THOUSANDS** *V2*
- **BLUE EYES** **BLUE EYES** *UNSIGNED*

Francine Orr/L.A. Times/Retna Ltd.

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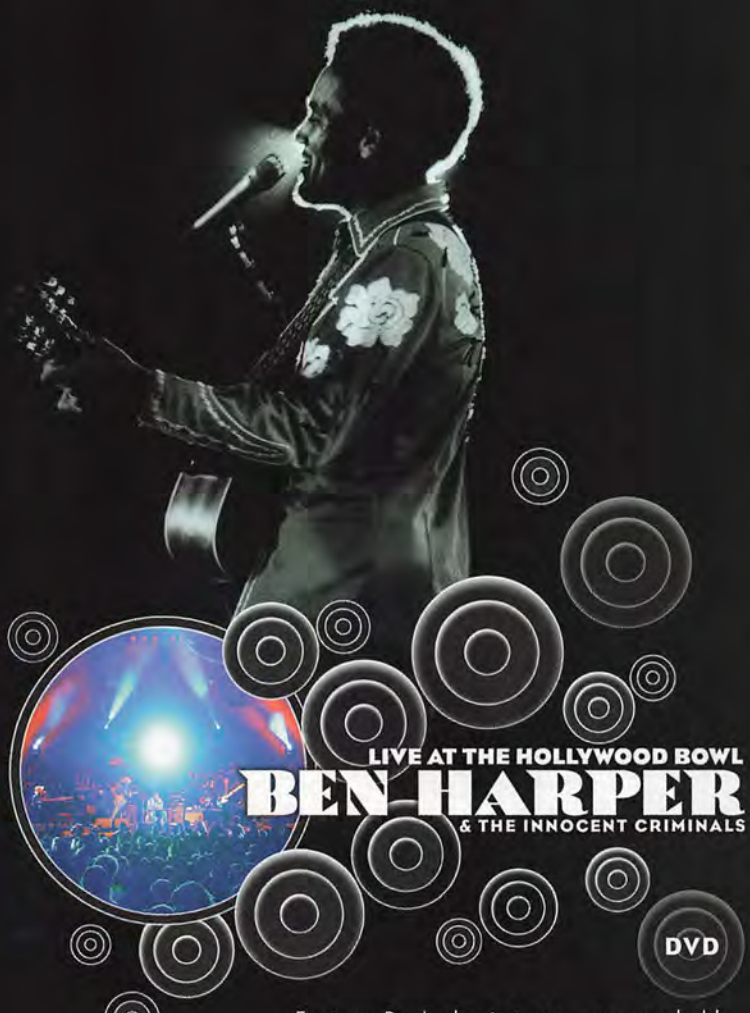

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full of a sweeping variety of types and blood-alcohol levels — it's an unexpected ode to diversity. Which is shocking, coming from the guy who waved the war flag on the post–September 11 anthem "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue." Now, *Shock'N Y'All* shows there's only one person who takes Keith more seriously than the Dixie Chicks' Natalie Maines (with whom he waged a nasty political feud): Keith himself. "If I Was Jesus" ponders what extra superpowers he'd have if he weren't just a saintly country singer. "The Taliban Song" makes fun of those who "pray to Allah." Keith has a gift for wrapping angry thoughts in man-of-the-people plain-speak, with a Lynyrd Skynyrd–meet–Jimmy Buffett friendliness. But underneath, there's often a set of mean clichés. "Freedom don't come free," he sings on a pro-soldier song. What's he talking about? You can download *Shock'N Y'All* on any P2P service, and you'll be hearing the best of it on the radio for months.

RJ SMITH

ASTONISHING FACT! >>
As a kid in Oklahoma, **REBA McENTIRE** trained to be a rodeo rider. At 19, she was discovered while singing the national anthem at the 1974 National Rodeo Finals.

KINKY

ATLAS ✪✪✪

SONIC 360/NETTWERK

¡Caramba! The great Mexican art-pop band is here

On first listen, Kinky are about as south-of-the-border and *muy caliente* as a college band from Indiana — with grinding machines and chirruping effects, they seem determined to sound as *Norte Americano* as possible. But this band (from Monterrey) is not in cultural denial, and its explosions of percussion, subtly picked guitar and witty pan-linguistic vocals make *Atlas* the most original spin on indie-pop in years. Sometimes they sound like a Mexican Talking Heads, yoking clever lyrics to pop-electro; elsewhere they're R.E.M. with an accent, or even a lilting, Latino Beatles. Joyful, sophisticated and prone to sudden bursts of vampire-movie keyboards, this really is a band unlike anything you've heard before. Lame *yanqui* outfits beware: They're here for your jobs.

ANDREW HARRISON

LUCKY BOYS CONFUSION

COMMITMENT ✪✪✪

ELEKTRA

Pleasingly predictable pop-punk from our nation's heartland

Lucky Boys Confusion have a lot more going for them than most pierced major-label pop-punkers. For one thing, the Chicagoans have been playing together for almost six years. For another, they know how to write winning hooks: The crunchy chords of "Hey Driver" and the sing-along choruses of "Ordinary" crackle and tremble with more than melodrama. And though singer Kaustubh Pandav does occasionally align himself with the Sum 41–style Axis of Immaturity ("I don't wanna stand here and say I'm sorry/I just want to drink beer and play Atari"), he mostly sticks to an inoffensively earnest yearning. Too bad his stabs at realpolitik — especially the cringing are-you-there-God-it's-me-Kaustubh "Something to Believe" — are such bummers. Sometimes it's better to be lucky than good.

ANDY GREENWALD

REBA McENTIRE

ROOM TO BREATHE ✪✪

MCA NASHVILLE

Country music's most successful redhead dances with the formula that brung her

After four years spent consolidating her media empire on Broadway and television (with the semi-loved WB series →

Kinky by name, standing next to a London bus by nature

Courtesy of Diana Baron Media

Furtado can barely sing a line without gasping or giggling.

OVERDECORATED

Portuguese-Canadian quirk queen overspices her entree

NELLY FURTADO

FOLKLORE ✪✪

DREAMWORKS

IT'S NOT OFTEN a musician has too many ideas, but that's the oddly troubling case with Nelly Furtado's second album. The virtues of her 2 million–selling debut, *Whoa, Nelly!* — freewheeling eclecticism, dippy Daisy Age charm — are magnified and distorted here until they become vices. Within the hyperactivity, there's no dialogue between the musical genres; they shout over one another in a cacophonous jumble.

So the jaunty hip-hop of "Fresh Off the Boat" becomes entangled in ear-splitting melismas, Portuguese scatting and, possibly, someone trying to maneuver a kitchen sink through the studio door. The relentless Latin stomp of "Força" (Portuguese for *kick ass,* apparently) wants to be uplifting but ends up merely tiring. Furtado, meanwhile, can barely sing a line without gasping, gabbling or giggling. If she were a kid, you'd tell her to stop fidgeting and sit still.

Behind the exotic window dressing, Furtado's real talent is far more conservative. You can picture arenas full of swaying arms during the sweeping AOR choruses of "Try" and "One-Trick Pony." Everywhere, though, lurk lyrics so graceless they sound as if they've been badly translated from the Japanese. "Força," we are told, "is the soundtrack to your ever-flowing life." And "Island of Wonder" ("The smile is bigger than the Atlantic Sea/It happens to bring out the Atlantis in me") is Madonna's "La Isla Bonita" rewritten for New Age crystal shops.

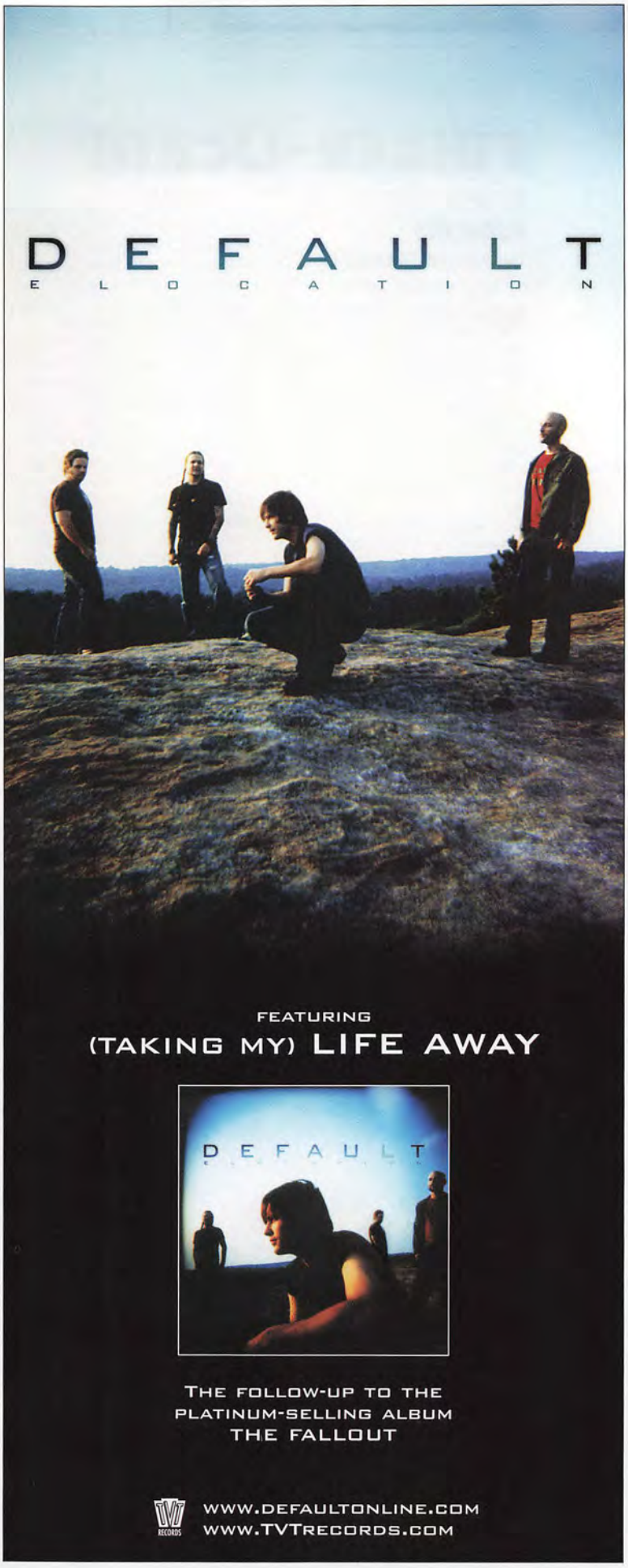
There's clearly imagination here, with strange little sonic tweaks and tics at every turn, but only once does it gel into something satisfying. The rapturous-glissando finale, "Childhood Dreams," seems to have wandered in from a different record, possibly one by Björk. Even here, though, Furtado alternates between Björk's breathy gulps and Kate Bush's vertiginous trills, as if auditioning for an alt-chanteuse version of *American Idol.* It sums up the whole album — Furtado could still be a fascinating talent, if only she stopped trying so damn hard.

DORIAN LYNSKEY

NELLY FURTADO'S CURRENT LISTENING

- **THE KRONOS QUARTET** **NUEVO** *ELEKTRA/ASYLUM*
- **BETH ORTON** **TRAILER PARK** *DEDICATED*

Courtesy of DreamWorks Records



FINGER-LICKIN'

Third solo romp from hip-hop's KFC-lovin' Redd Foxx

LUDACRIS

CHICKEN N BEER ★★★★

DISTURBING THA PEACE/DEF JAM SOUTH

LUDACRIS DOESN'T GET enough respect. Since *Back for the First Time* in 2000, the Chicago-born, Atlanta-repping clown prince has created the most accessible, fun-loving, street-credible funky crunk available.

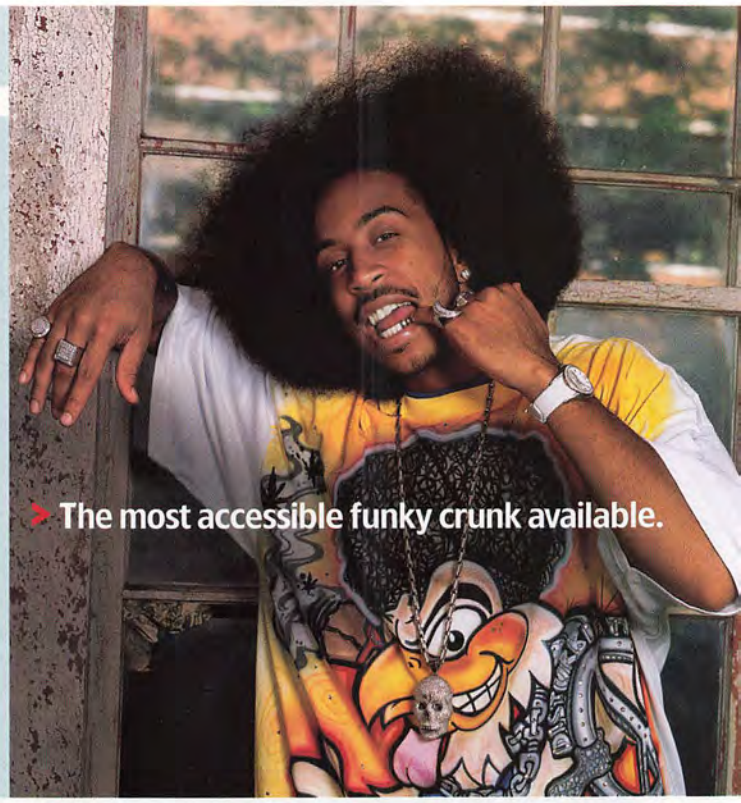
He has such a way with words that he can resuscitate overused samples with opposite ends of flow. Issac Hayes's "Walk on By" benefits from breathless, rapid-fire word-speak; "Diamond in the Back" finds Ludacris employing an airy, tailing flow to enter the mind of a kid with big dreams and empty pockets over William Devaughn's burner "Be Thankful for What You Got."

Even during his lascivious moments — he spends four songs in the nether regions, not including the ones with the repeated refrains "fuck you" and "blow it out your ass" — he balances skill, style and comedy. On "Splash Waterfalls," he uses tricky alternating stanzas to depict the difference between having sex and making love. On the Snoop Dogg–assisted "Hoes in My Room," he rhymes: "Now, it was five B.A.P. ho's and they looked like trash/But one was a midget, so we'll just say four and a half."

The sounds range from cavernous and industrial (Kanye West on the first single, "Stand Up") to cartoonish carnival sounds ("Screwed Up," an ode to the woozy, off-kilter hip-hop favored by Houston's underground scene) to the coughs and semiautomatic gunfire of DJ Paul and Juicy J's "We Got," on which Luda and his crew profess their love for various firearms, especially automatic-rifle banana clips. "Got killers in my squad and I'm the nicest one in my group," he raps. "But I got bananas for you niggas, and I ain't talkin' 'bout fruit." Show some respect. *kris ex*

LUDACRIS'S CURRENT LISTENING

- **OUTKAST** SPEAKERBOXXX/THE LOVE BELOW *ARISTA*
- **CHINGY** JACKPOT *DISTURBING THA PEACE/PRIORITY/CAPITOL*



Reba), the forever not-quite-old Reba McEntire returns with her twenty-fifth album. Unlike other first ladies of country Dolly Parton and Patty Loveless, who recently drove their careers out of the black hole and into the bluegrass, the Nash-pop coppertop shows little sign of returning to any but her own red, red roots. On this ride around, McEntire exhales her familiar atmosphere of tough upbringings, difficult loves and delicate gradations of sentiment, along with a mess of Jesus and jewel-bright production. Despite the familiar rule that sad songs say so little, "Moving Oleta" is a rich, bittersweet cloud. Solid and shiny as a new nickel, McEntire's lead single, "I'm Gonna Take That Mountain," also lingers in the ear as the rest of the disc melts into thin air.

RENE VIENET

MELOMANE

SOLRESOL ✪✪✪

VERMILLION

Groovy retro TV music dressed up in pop-song drag

If the Brooklyn sextet Melomane had been born 30 years earlier, they could've struck it rich doing TV music. Their second album establishes one kicky, lush instrumental atmosphere after another, with clever arrangements augmented by cello, Herb Alpert–esque trumpet and a bank of keyboards with a vintage warble. There are wry details and allusions all over the place — they even lift the wordless vocal refrain of Duran Duran's "Hungry Like the Wolf" for "The Spirit of Smoke." As songs, though, their mood sketches are more evocative than they are memorable — even the lyrics in their tribute to New York tour guide Timothy "Speed" Levitch seem like an afterthought to its robotic waltz. "All of the things that I'm trying to say could be sung in tones," they declare on the title track, and they're right about that.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DANNII MINOGUE

NEON NIGHTS ✪✪✪

ULTRA

Surprisingly dirty disco from Kylie's little sister

It took a long, hard bout of career engineering for Kylie Minogue to transform herself from a fluffy pop moppet into today's world empress of sex disco. After 13 years as the Kmart Kylie, her little sister, Dannii, now takes a similar — if slightly B-list — approach to self-reinvention. There are lots of sweaty European trance productions, pumpingly gay bass lines and sweeping strings; *Neon Nights* is a slightly tacky disco heaven. Cruel genetics indicate that blond Kylie will always have the edge on brunette Dannii, but it's probably safe to say that big sis has never panted out a love song to her "female self-massage accessory" the way Dannii does here on the amazingly filthy "Vibe On."

ANDREW HARRISON

Dannii Minogue: Can we check those pockets, miss?

MUSIQ

SOULSTAR ✪✪✪✪

DEF SOUL

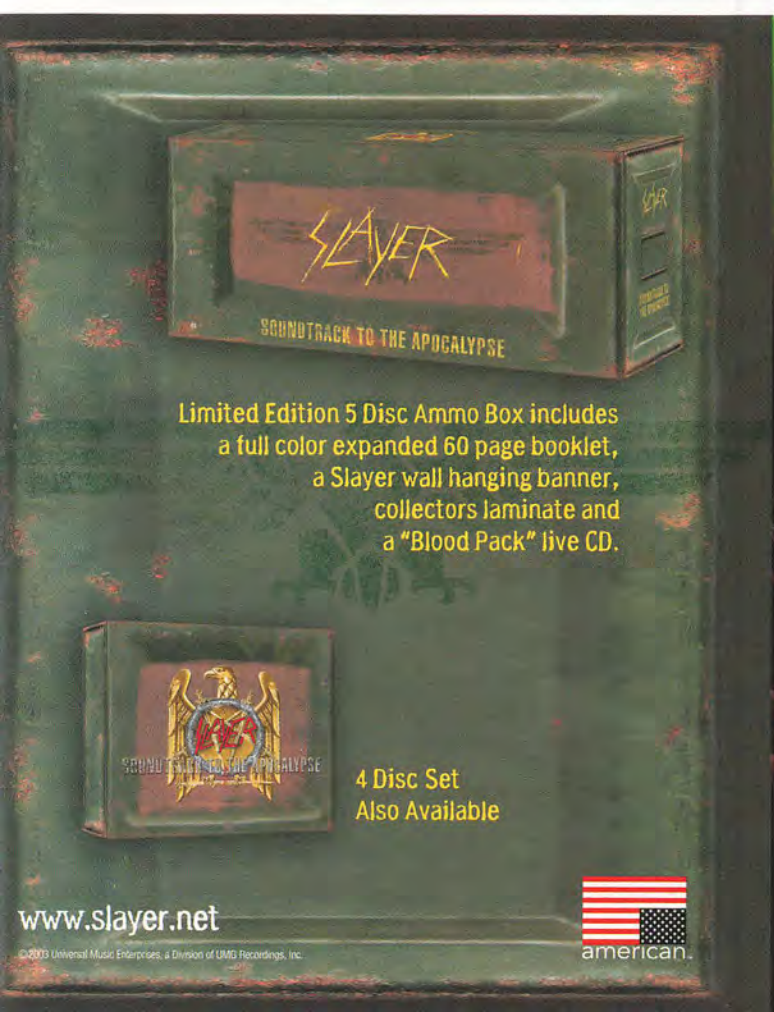
Grandiosely named Philadelphia soul singer finds new sophistication on third album

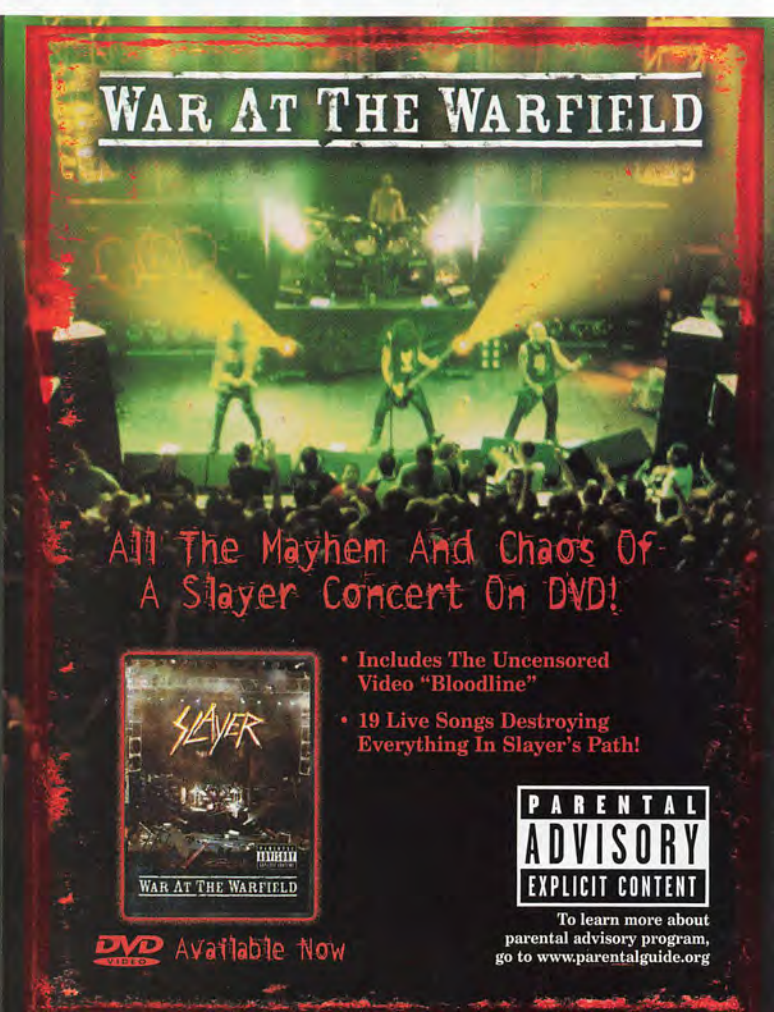
VINTAGE '70s R&B

Musiq has cleared a singular space for himself in the cluttered, cloned universe of current R&B. This Philly resident and his production team (principally Ivan Barias and Carvin Haggins) are versed in classic arranging and songwriting, with a balance that lets him bridge the generation gap in black music with grace and growing maturity. "Who Knows" harks back to the '80s with Earth, Wind & Fire–style horns, intricate guitar lines and terrific backing vocals by En Vogue's Dawn Robinson. "Womanopoly" works a Monopoly metaphor over a choppy, engaging rhythm. And the devotional "Reason" has smart, beautifully arranged vocals that accentuate the syncopated hook. A cover of the Rolling Stones' disco song "Miss You" falls flat, but overall this musically sophisticated collection is one of the best R&B records of the year.

NELSON GEORGE

Opposite page: Phil Mucci. This page: courtesy of Ultra Records





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> McLachlan sings about enormous psychic ordeals.

THE DARKNESS

Canadian singer makes a warm bath of emotional struggle

SARAH McLACHLAN

AFTERGLOW ✪✪✪

ARISTA

>> NOBODY GETS MORE mileage out of weariness than Sarah McLachlan. On the gorgeously sculpted, six-years-in-the-making *Afterglow*, the art-pop star tells of enormous energy-sapping psychic ordeals in a voice that's heavy and woeful and nearly drained of fight. Her characters march dutifully along, determined to equal their daily challenges but worn out from building all those mysteries, tired of looking inside and not liking what they see.

In a moment of reflection, the protagonist of the album's most amazing track, the slithering "Train Wreck," discovers she's a "train wreck waiting to happen, a wildfire borne of frustration." At the culmination of "Time," an extraordinary account of relationship turmoil, a marathon spat ends with the cease-fire declaration, "If I agree, it's just to appease you, 'cause I don't remember what we're fighting for."

Exhaustion might have been a muse for McLachlan, who during the making of *Afterglow* lost her mother to cancer and five months later gave birth to her first daughter, India. But she doesn't let any vague malaise creep into the music. The stately processionals and somber hymns (which often resemble those on her 1997 megahit, *Surfacing*) move at a purposeful snap, propelled by pastel brushstrokes and faint hints of electronic sound-morphing.

As she has done since her first set of odes to emotional fortitude, 1988's *Touch*, McLachlan elucidates her themes with her phrasing: She can (and does) talk all day about different manifestations of vulnerability, but a few minutes of her low-pitched keening and half-whispered confessions quickly establish the same plaintive meaning.

It's quite a feat: crushing, weighty themes conveyed via music that floats in a netherworld a few steps off the ground. Even the dark moments eventually locate a sliver of light, and though she may be numb from the battles and resigned to the fact that we're all train wrecks waiting for collision, McLachlan's songs steal a minute or two of grace before impact. *TOM MOON*

SARAH McLACHLAN'S CURRENT LISTENING

>> COLDPLAY
A RUSH OF BLOOD TO THE HEAD *CAPITOL*

>> BRIAN ENO
APOLLO: ATMOSPHERES AND SOUNDTRACKS *EG*

Kharen Hill

NELLY

DA DERRTY VERSIONS: THE REINVENTION ✪✪

UNIVERSAL

Shrugged-off remix set from St. Louis's bandage-cheeked star

Nelly has run out of status symbols to name-drop. On "King's Highway," one of two new songs here, he brags about white gold, 22-inch rims — and Dunlap tires? Sorry, but that's conspicuous consumption guaranteed to impress no one, except maybe Meineke employees. From the boasts to the beats, this collection is a dud, treating a smashing catalog of hits to one un-smashing overhaul: "Ride Wit Me" is set to a cheesy (albeit unlikely) sample from John Mayer's "No Such Thing" and "Air Force Ones" becomes a bizarre collision of heavy metal and gospel, while "Country Grammar" is unaltered, save for a speedy, forgettable E-40 rhyme. It's not a total cash-in, thanks to the new "Iz U," which hijacks the stern piano and funk guitar of the *People's Court* theme. The remaining fare is criminally ho-hum — someone call Judge Wapner!

JONAH WEINER

THE OFFSPRING

SPLINTER ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA

California punk veterans come out and play the same old thing

OLD, BUT STILL PUNK

The Offspring's 1994 Top 40 hit "Come Out and Play" transformed their career but not their sound. The SoCal quartet, around for 18 years, still specializes in galloping, Bad Religion–style protest punk complemented by occasional rhythmic variations. The band's new album features two change-of-beat numbers: "Hit That" is a synth-pop tune with an earnest message ("We're raising kids now/Who raise themselves"), while "The Worst Hangover Ever" is a reggae number on a lighter (and self-explanatory) theme. Whether trending toward metal ("Long Way Home") or pop (the wounded cheating song "Spare Me the Details"), Dexter Holland's stiff, high-pitched bark sounds exactly the same. Only on "Prison Song," a jokey fake-oldie, does the Offspring's weakness for novelty tunes lead them astray.

MARK JENKINS

PUDDLE OF MUDD

LIFE ON DISPLAY ✪✪

FLAWLESS/GEFFEN

Teen spirit re-recycled

Puddle of Mudd have heard all those playa-hatin' Nirvana comparisons. After selling 4 million copies of their 2001 album, *Come Clean*, they obviously couldn't care less. *Life on Display* continues to chisel away at the grunge-encrusted rock that Cobain built, this time with a few more acoustic guitars. There are enough soft-loud verse-chorus dynamics and raspy-sensitive-guy vocals to make any *In Utero* fan gasp in disbelief. Singer Wes Scantlin has his checklist of Kurt-approved bad vibes down cold: betrayal ("Away From Me"), resentment ("Nothing Left to Lose"), drugs ("Already Gone"), alienation ("Freak of the World"). But without the blue-eyed soul conviction of the original, it's enough to make even second-tier grunge has-beens like Seven Mary Three sound like innovators.

GREG KOT

Rage Against the Machine attempt to bring down government, staircase.

RAEKWON

THE LEX DIAMOND STORY ✪✪✪

UNIVERSAL

Portly Wu-Tang MC returns to glory on third solo album

In 1995, the Wu-Tang Clan's Raekwon the Chef crafted *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx*, a John Woo/Mafioso–inspired epic — immortalized in hip-hop colloquialism as "the purple tape" due to its packaging — which established the Clan as rap's premier creative force. A decade later, as the group plays catch-up to the ruling cliques of the day, a revitalized Rae urgently freaks his densely packed, abstract streetspeak over beautiful urban calamity. On "The Missing Watch," he's "eyeballing every fake Frankie Lymon in the joint" at a party where his $85,000 timepiece has slipped off his wrist. During "Pitbull Fights," his astute eye notes that an adversary's "veins got ham in them." It's no *Cuban Linx II*, but it is the first time this millennium that someone aside from the Wu-Tang Clan's Ghostface Killah makes the crew's halcyon era seem like only yesterday.

kris ex

I LOVE THIS CD!

SEANN WILLIAM SCOTT
STAR OF *THE RUNDOWN* AND *AMERICAN WEDDING*

THE DANDY WARHOLS WELCOME TO THE MONKEY HOUSE
CAPITOL

"I've always loved the Dandy Warhols. They have this real '80s vibe. It's almost a Duran Duran kind of vibe."

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

LIVE AT THE OLYMPIC AUDITORIUM ✪✪✪

EPIC

Live set from the Los Angeles polit-rockers who made concerts feel like protest rallies

Over eight years, Rage Against the Machine made sexy, charged entertainment out of leftist activism — no small feat, considering how hard it is to find rhymes for *Rwanda* or *Milosevic*. Recorded just months before the band split — and almost exactly a year before September 11 turned millions worldwide into protesters — their first U.S. live set packs the fist-throwing, righteous thrill of a campus demonstration. On "Calm Like a Bomb" and "Bulls on Parade," Tom Morello's guitar beeps, saws, melts and roars. Zach de la Rocha fills his verses with political-history details and moves to broader sloganeering in his choruses; the generality carries Rage's songs across the years. "Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me!" he squawks on "Killing in the Name Of," galvanizing an adolescent battle cry with a vague, grand sense of purpose. Meaning you can shout it at Donald Rumsfeld — or your dad.

JONAH WEINER

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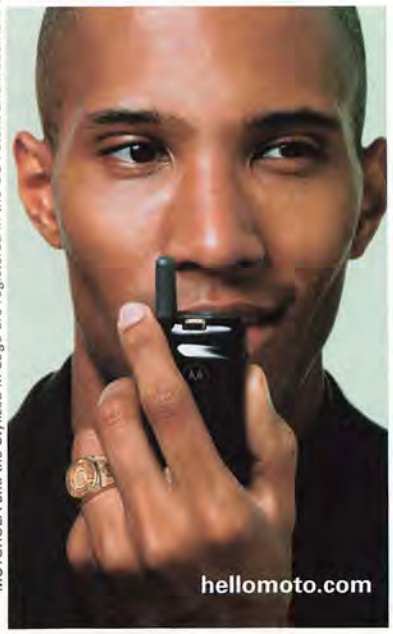


RZA

BIRTH OF A PRINCE ✪✪✪

WU/SANCTUARY

Wu-Tang Clan honcho fills third solo bid with grimy soundscapes

Rapper-producer RZA's knotted mysticism and sorrowful, minimalist soul loops inspired legions of lesser underground MCs to transmit crypto-intellectual mumbo-jumbo over gritty ghetto-noir beats. On "Fast Cars" — where choppy horns bleat drunkenly like a burglar alarm you could listen to all day — it's clear who invented the style. Name-dropping Rudyard Kipling's story "Rikki Tikki Tavi" and *Incredible Hulk* star Bill Bixby within a few bars before rolling out the line "Singing sick silky six-syllable stanzas" with sticky grace, RZA's coded swirls are fascinating. Elsewhere, "See the Joy" tracks a sperm cell's epic struggle ("I guess the womb is the first stage of hell," he muses). The rococo, Liberace-like piano line should magnify the lyrical goofiness, but the result is somehow poignant, and more proof of RZA's eccentric genius.

G. BEATO

RAPHAEL SAADIQ

ALL HITS AT THE HOUSE OF BLUES ✪✪✪

POOKIE

Former Tony! Toni! Toné! boot-knocker goes live for a sprawling hits set

In an era of rap icons and R&B solo stars, Raphael Saadiq is a great team player. First with his longtime band Tony! Toni! Toné! and more briefly with Lucy Pearl, Saadiq has excelled as a collaborative singer-writer-producer. But his small catalog of solo work has been only competent, as if the Oakland artist were struggling to find an individual voice. This crisp live walk through his career suggests that he's finding himself. Despite the welcome presence of TTT on several urban classics ("It Never Rains," "Anniversary") and cameos by Joi and the MIA D'Angelo (remember him?), Saadiq's maturing voice carries this two-CD set. As he's gotten older, his high tenor has deepened enough that his loverman moans and meditations on wayward paramours sound well-earned. His challenge now is to create a record of new material as durable as his old.

NELSON GEORGE

STEW

SOMETHING DEEPER THAN THESE CHANGES ✪✪✪✪

SMILE

Weird, wonderful L.A. songwriter gets up-close and personal on third CD

Although he sports a voice as big as a cathedral when fronting his alarmingly named rock band, the Negro Problem, Mark "Stew" Stewart fills this lovely, low-key collection of psychedelic cabaret tunes with quiet confidences concerning his mother's death ("Love Like That"), his daughter's birth ("The Sun I Always Wanted") and artistic self-sufficiency ("Tomorrow Gone"). One of America's finest songwriters by any standard, Stew sounds right at home in the "Kingdom of Drink," where "magic liquids change the way you think," and even more so when turning against his bohemian milieu in the hilariously snarky "L.A. Arteest Café." Brainy lyrics, sticky melodies and a woozy, churchlike intimacy make this one gem of a Sunday-morning confessional.

RICHARD GEHR

Timbaland (right) and Magoo: Even their underwear is denim.

TIMBALAND & MAGOO

UNDER CONSTRUCTION PART II ✪✪✪✪

BLACKGROUND/UNIVERSAL

Virginia studio don throws a rap party, but his beats steal the show

Timbaland is beyond proving himself; the producer of Missy Elliott, Jay-Z and Justin Timberlake, he's "gobblin' up Grammys like he Pac-Man," as guest Frank Lee White puts it on the beatmaster's third album with partner Magoo. So for the most part, the grooves ride low and easy, like a next-generation G-funk transplanted to the Virginia coastline: Call it V-funk. (The opening track is even called "Straight Outta Virginia.") But Timbaland can't rest that easy, and just beneath the languid surface is effortlessly brilliant innovation in every direction, from the funk-rock drive of "Shennanigns," with Bubba Sparxxx, to the Eastern modes and Hindi raps of "Indian Flute" and "Naughty Eyes." Guests rap about digital piracy (Elliott's "Cop That Shit") and a "big white spaceship" (Pharrell Williams from N*E*R*D*), but they seem to know the beats will upstage them.

BEN SISARIO

I LOVE THIS CD!

BILLY BOB THORNTON
STAR OF *BAD SANTA* AND *THE ALAMO*

RODNEY CROWELL
THE HOUSTON KID
SUGAR HILL

"This blew me away. Wow, this shit is special. 'The Rock of My Soul' is one of the best songs ever written."

TRIUMPH THE INSULT COMIC DOG

COME POOP WITH ME ✪✪

WARNER BROS.

Comedy disc from *Late Night* favorite is the *Sgt. Pepper's* of poop jokes

POOP PUP GOES POP

This cigar-chomping celebrity sock puppet, best known for mouthing scat jokes on *Late Night With Conan O'Brien* and getting bitch-slapped by Eminem, proves once and for all that he's a one-trick puppy. There are three main gags here. In prank phone calls, Triumph tastelessly reveals the fact that he's a dog, not a human (he asks a nurse in "STD Phone Call" why his "balls taste funny"). Faux-romantic sing-alongs like "Underage Bichon" ("She told me she was 1") rely on canine-specific sex puns — "She said I was hung like a Great Dane," for instance. Finally, there are gratuitous references to famous dogs, including the pointlessly un-P.C. "Benji's Queer." A great CD — to poop on!

NICK CATUCCI

From top: Jonathan Mannion; Diena Brengola/WireImage.com

JAMES BLOOD ULMER

NO ESCAPE FROM THE BLUES: THE ELECTRIC LADY SESSIONS ✪✪✪

HYENA

Great jazz-rock guitarist visits Jimi Hendrix's studio, borrows the voodoo

Since surfacing in avant saxophonist Ornette Coleman's group nearly three decades ago, James Blood Ulmer has continued to wed free-jazz's improvisational spirit to rock's sheer power. His last two records, produced by Vernon Reid of Living Colour, apply that attack to gutbucket blues. Though this isn't quite up to 2001's *Memphis Blood*, Ulmer's tensile "acoustic" solos (actually his usual Gibson Byrdland unplugged) are just as strong as the electric firestorms, and he sings in an amateurish voice that's nonetheless oddly compelling. Leon Gruenbaum's snake-charmer keyboards and Charlie Burnham's freakish electric wah-wah fiddle and slide mandolin provide apt color. The album loosely follows a classic blues theme — rural migrants adapting to the city — best nailed in the otherworldly arrangement of the ancient blues "Trouble in Mind."

JOHN MORTHLAND

VARIOUS ARTISTS

JUST BECAUSE I'M A WOMAN: SONGS OF DOLLY PARTON ✪✪

SUGAR HILL

Dull singers kill great songs with so-called kindness

Tribute albums are the great backhanded compliments of the music world, in which performers seize terrific songs and take great pains to make them as boring as possible. Superior Nashville songwriter Dolly Parton gets the treatment here, and the simplest, most straightforward versions work best, particularly Sinéad O'Connor's quivering "Dagger Through the Heart," which plugs into the fierceness, rather than the tenderness, of the Appalachian ballad tradition. Elsewhere, though, Melissa Etheridge steps in where Whitney Houston left off to drain the remaining blood from Parton's most famous song, "I Will Always Love You," and rising Nashville upstart Mindy Smith sleepwalks through the cheated-on plea "Jolene." Worst of all is Shania Twain, who takes the most heartbreaking song in all of country music, "Coat of Many Colors," and paints it beige.

STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

VARIOUS ARTISTS

MTV2 HEADBANGER'S BALL ✪✪✪✪

ROADRUNNER

The best available guide to metal from big stars and underground legends

METAL FOR DUMMIES

With two discs spanning metal's chart-toppers and international underground, this 40-song companion to the newly revived show *Headbanger's Ball* reiterates the indestructible genre's ongoing diversity and uncompromising heaviness. Crummy hits by Godsmack and Stone Sour are flattened by the Deftones' screamo-squared "Hexagram," the slow, almost soulful build of Mudvayne's "World's So Cold" and Slayer's live rendition of the classic speed-metal tsunami "Raining Blood." The even better indie set boasts Italy's harrowingly lovely, female-fronted Lacuna Coil, two Swedish acts — the precise and brutal Meshuggah and the soaringly anthemic In Flames — and the epic, twisted "March of the Fire Ants," from Atlanta stoner quartet Mastodon. No survey of post-millennial metal better navigates America's radio rabble or the raging global scene.

NICK CATUCCI

VARIOUS ARTISTS

THICKER THAN WATER ✪✪

BRUSHFIRE/UNIVERSAL

Jack Johnson–approved tunes for new surfing documentary

For four decades, the sound of surf music has been defined by trebly badass guitars and sun-dappled harmony vocals. Now, Jack Johnson rides the waves in a far mellower mood in the snooze-inducing soundtrack he has assembled for *Thicker Than Water*, his DVD travelogue of unlikely surf destinations. Fringe trip-hopper Finley Quaye brings a touch of ganja-stoked introspection that shimmers like a sunset ("Even After All"); G. Love pours on the blissed-out *blooooze* sauce (the previously unreleased "Hobo Blues"); and Bombay the Hard Way, a side project of underground hip-hoppers Dan the Automator and DJ Shadow, suggests how surf-guitar desperado Dick Dale might have sounded had he taken up the sitar ("My Guru"). On his four new songs, Johnson remains typically unhurried ("Holes to Heaven") to the point where he comes off like a guy who spends more time in his pajamas than on the ocean.

GREG KOT

VARIOUS ARTISTS

WIG IN A BOX ✪✪✪

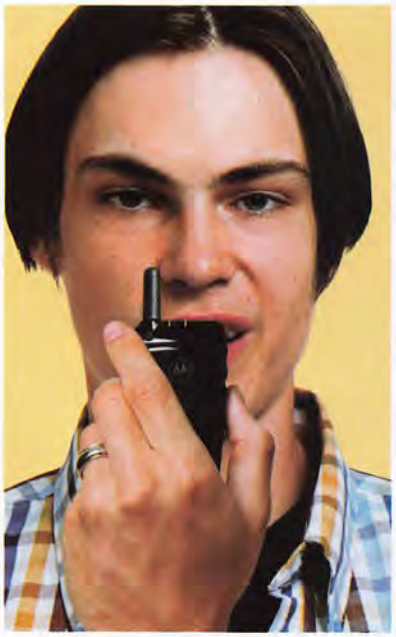
OFF RECORDS

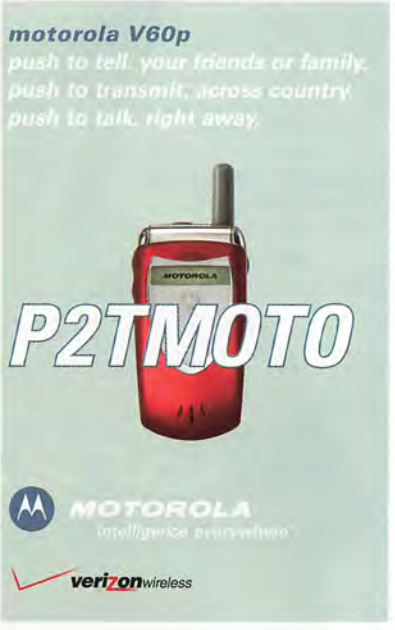
Alt-rock all-stars cover a glam-rock musical

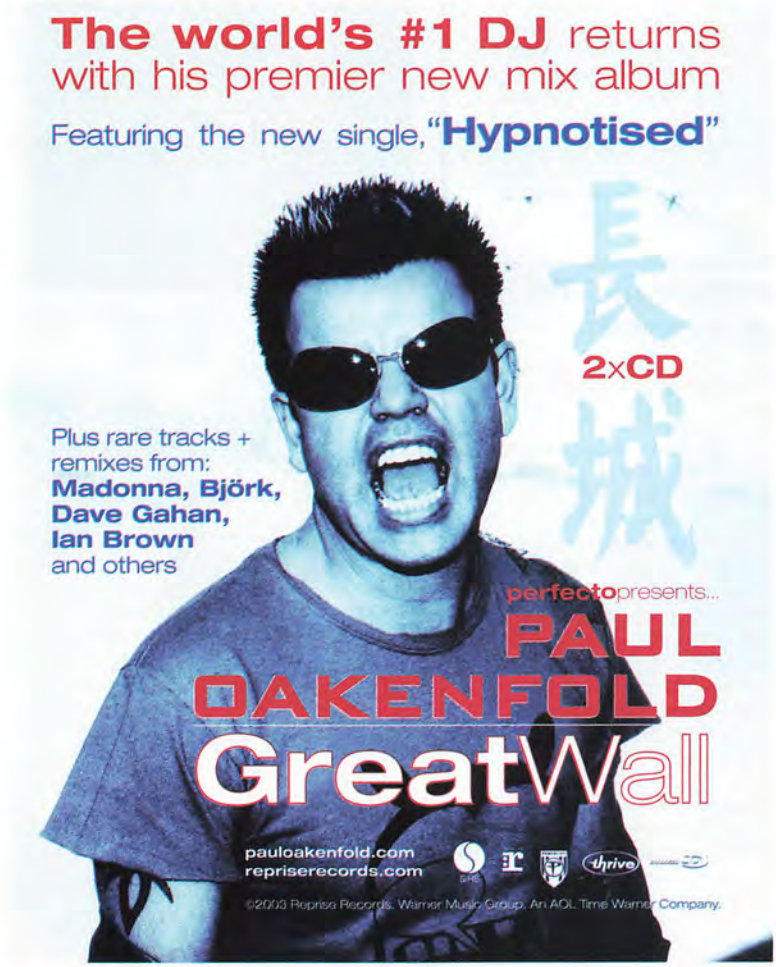
The gender-bending musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* has a cult following among rock bands, and the artists covering its songs on this benefit for the Hetrick-Martin Institute, a gay-youth organization, include both indie all-stars and utter ringers. Texas skinny-ties Spoon streamlining the bombastic anthem "Tear Me Down" into taut New Wave, you might expect; the B-52s' Fred Schneider joining punk heroines Sleater-Kinney for a furious slalom through "Angry Inch," you might not. There are some surprising misfires here (Yo La Tengo backing up Yoko Ono is better in theory than in practice, and *Hedwig* writers John Cameron Mitchell and Stephen Trask's new song, "Milford Lake," is a snooze), but also some unexpected treats — the Breeders' ➔

George Holz

No one had the heart to tell Shania Twain it wasn't actually a cello.







sinuous "Wicked Little Town" is the best recording they've made in years, and "Midnight Radio" was made for Cyndi Lauper to torch.

DOUGLAS WOLK

WESTSIDE CONNECTION

TERRORIST THREATS ✪✪

PRIORITY

Ice Cube and nonthreatening homies compare themselves to bin Laden

A decade ago, Ice Cube was a headstrong firebrand fanning the flames of black nationalism; now, he and his "supergroup" can't even make terrorism sound controversial. With their '96 hit "Bow Down" a distant memory, he, WC and Mack-10 reprise their roles as "the gangsta, the killa and the drug dealer," updated with bad Taliban references ("Like an al Qaeda thug, we can blow up together") and gangsta-as-terrorist brags. Though "Bangin' at the Party" and "Gangsta Nation" are great chunks of hydraulic G-funk, the album is largely nonthreatening: The messy, egocentric "Superstar" and the trite rowdiness of "Get Ignit" are unconvincing, while Cube's "Pimp the System" ("Your prostitutes wear high-heel boots/My prostitutes wear three-piece suits") is about as subversive as *Friday After Next*.

HUA HSU

WILSHIRE

NEW UNIVERSE ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA

Husband-and-wife duo's debut is like reenacting the stations of the cross

"*Aaaaaahh'm* looking for a hallelujah," sings Lori Wilshire, half of this married duo. But prayers are few on this clear effort to distance the group from its origins in Christian-contemporary music and cross over in the wake of Evanescence. They're about halfway there. "Without You" and "When" hold a potent mix of Nashville polish, CCM uplift and Beatlesque vocal hooks. WWJD? He'd raise a lighter to the uplifting openers "Special" and "Turn It Around." Unfortunately, the album is heavily padded with inspirational piffle. "In Your Arms" and "Tonight" were inspired by letters from WWII soldiers to their wives, and with strings arranged by Paul Buckmaster (Elton John), they sound like weapons-grade Céline Dion — soaring and boring.

ALEC HANLEY BEMIS

Blender Approved

The best new releases of the last three months

AESOP ROCK

BAZOOKA TOOTH

DEFINITIVE JUX

Underground hip-hop luminary rolls his chaotic, disjointed lyrics across chaotic, disjointed beats on his third album — it's head-expanding crunk.

MANDY MOORE

COVERAGE

EPIC

The platinum teen sensation tries her hand at '70s and '80s hits, from XTC to Blondie to Joan Armatrading, and fills them out spectacularly.

PINK

TRY THIS

LAFACE/ARISTA

The queen bee of chart angst gets raunchier without losing her melodic touch. Vast success hasn't made Pink any less dysfunctional.

OBIE TRICE

CHEERS

SHADY/INTERSCOPE

Eminem's newest protégé leavens chilling gangsta taunts with offbeat comic relief on his excellent debut. Em, Timbaland and Dr. Dre produce.

PEARL JAM LOST DOGS

The career-spanning rarities and b-sides double CD.

PEARL JAM LOST DOGS

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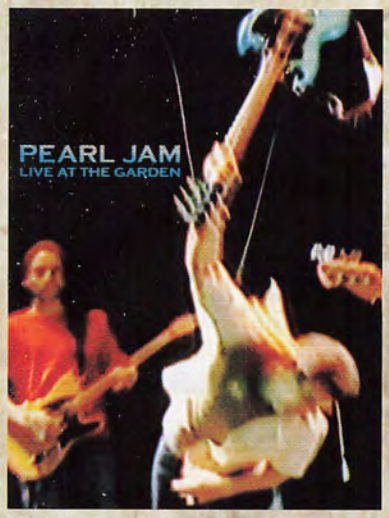

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Rage Against The Machine

Live At The Grand Olympic Auditorium

CD - in stores November 25.
Features 16 songs, including "Killing In The Name," "Bulls On Parade," "Freedom" and "Bullet In Your Head."

DVD - in stores December 9.
Rage Against The Machine's final concert ever. Recorded September 13, 2000.

The DVD also features footage from their historic performance outside the 2000 Democratic National Convention at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

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TARGET

WEEK ENDING SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9

THE 40 MOST POPULAR SONGS IN AMERICA

The G-Unit are in the hizzouse, and at the top of our chizzart!

1 G-UNIT
"STUNT 101"
BEG FOR MERCY

50 Cent, the year's biggest-selling artist — by millions of records — would like you to meet his homies, the G-Unit. The video for this lesson in extravagance is in heavy rotation on MTV, MTV2 and BET. Featuring production from Dr. Dre and Eminem, the G-Unit's debut CD, *Beg for Mercy*, drops this month; then, fresh off a European tour, G-Unit team up with Obie Trice for Australian tour dates in December.

HOW WE DID IT (daily double)

The Most Popular Songs chart is based on radio and video airplay, and album sales. Provided by HITSDailyDouble.com: "Proof that any idiot in the music business can have a Web site."

POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"STUNT 101"	G-UNIT	*BEG FOR MERCY* SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE
2	"ME AGAINST THE MUSIC"	BRITNEY SPEARS	*IN THE ZONE* JIVE
3	"INVISIBLE"	CLAY AIKEN	*MEASURE OF A MAN* RCA
4	"RIGHT NOW"	KORN	*TAKE A LOOK IN THE MIRROR* EPIC
5	"PASS THAT DUTCH"	MISSY ELLIOTT	*THIS IS NOT A TEST* GOLD MIND/ELEKTRA
6	"FLYING WITHOUT WINGS"	RUBEN STUDDARD	J RECORDS
7	"FEELING THIS"	BLINK-182	*BLINK-182* GEFFEN
8	"HOLIDAE IN"	CHINGY FEAT. LUDACRIS AND SNOOP DOGG	*JACKPOT* DISTURBING THA PEACE/CAPITOL
9	"IT'S MY LIFE"	NO DOUBT	*THE SINGLES 1992–2003* INTERSCOPE
10	"ADDICTED"	ENRIQUE IGLESIAS	*SEVEN* INTERSCOPE
11	"AWAY FROM ME"	PUDDLE OF MUDD	*LIFE ON DISPLAY* FLAWLESS/GEFFEN
12	"RUNNIN' "	2PAC FEAT. THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G.	*TUPAC RESURRECTION ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK* AMARU/INTERSCOPE
13	"TROUBLE"	PINK	*TRY THIS* LAFACE/ARISTA
14	"THIS IS HOW WE DO"	BIG TYMERS	*BIG MONEY HEAVY WEIGHTS* CASH MONEY/UNIVERSAL
15	"NUMB"	LINKIN PARK	*METEORA* WARNER BROS.
16	"CLAP BACK"	JA RULE	*BLOOD IN MY EYE* MURDER INC./DEF JAM
17	"FEEL LIKE MAKING LOVE"	KID ROCK	*KID ROCK* ATLANTIC
18	"FALLEN"	SARAH McLACHLAN	*AFTERGLOW* ARISTA
19	"STAND UP"	LUDACRIS FEAT. SHAWNNA	*CHICKEN N BEER* DEF JAM SOUTH
20	"THE WAY YOU MOVE"	OUTKAST	*SPEAKERBOXXX/ THE LOVE BELOW* ARISTA
21	"DAMN!"	YOUNGBLOODZ FEAT. LIL JON	*DRANKIN PATNAZ* ARISTA
22	"IZ U"	NELLY	*DA DERRTY VERSIONS* FO' REEL/UNIVERSAL
23	"WILL YOU"	P.O.D.	*PAYABLE ON DEATH* ATLANTIC
24	"PARTY TO DAMASCUS"	WYCLEF JEAN	*THE PREACHER'S SON* J RECORDS
25	"HEY YA!"	OUTKAST	*SPEAKERBOXXX/ THE LOVE BELOW* ARISTA
26	"LA, LA, LA"	JAY-Z	*BAD BOYS 2 ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK* BAD BOY/UNIVERSAL
27	"WHITE FLAG"	DIDO	*LIFE FOR RENT* ARISTA
28	"READ YOUR MIND"	AVANT	*PRIVATE ROOM* GEFFEN
29	"STACY'S MOM"	FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE	*WELCOME INTERSTATE MANAGERS* S-CURVE/VIRGIN
30	"BABY BOY"	BEYONCÉ FEAT. SEAN PAUL	*DANGEROUSLY IN LOVE* COLUMBIA
31	"FELL IN LOVE WITH A BOY"	JOSS STONE	*THE SOUL SESSIONS* S-CURVE
32	"POWERLESS"	NELLY FURTADO	*FOLKLORE* DREAMWORKS
33	"SO FAR AWAY"	STAIND	*14 SHADES OF GREY* FLIP/ELEKTRA
34	"OUT OF CONTROL"	HOOBASTANK	*THE REASON* ISLAND
35	"PERFECT"	SIMPLE PLAN	*NO PADS, NO HELMETS... JUST BALLS* LAVA/ATLANTIC
36	"SO YESTERDAY"	HILARY DUFF	*METAMORPHOSIS* BUENA VISTA/HOLLYWOOD
37	"YOU AND I BOTH"	JASON MRAZ	*WAITING FOR MY ROCKET TO COME* ELEKTRA
38	"I HATE EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU"	THREE DAYS GRACE	*THREE DAYS GRACE* JIVE
39	"COMIN' FROM WHERE I'M FROM"	ANTHONY HAMILTON	*COMIN' FROM WHERE I'M FROM* SO SO DEF/ARISTA
40	"MEANT TO LIVE"	SWITCHFOOT	*THE BEAUTIFUL LETDOWN* REB INK/COLUMBIA

2 BRITNEY SPEARS
"ME AGAINST THE MUSIC"
IN THE ZONE

Torch-passing alert! Madonna helps the 26-times-platinum blonde launch her fourth album, guest-spotting on this lightning-tempo dance track. This month, Spears visits with Regis and Kelly, and ABC airs a prime-time all-Brit Thanksgiving special. Next month, you can worship her on the cover of *Blender*!

4 KORN
"RIGHT NOW"
TAKE A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Fake-blood alert! The video for "Right Now" will be created entirely by fans: Korn put out a call for the "sickest, most twisted, most fucked-up short film footage [and] animation," promising to edit together the best submissions into a clip.

5 MISSY ELLIOTT
"PASS THAT DUTCH"
THIS IS NOT A TEST

With bass rumbles deep enough to move the biggest of badonka-donks, Missy's latest Timbaland-produced gem comes on the heels of her MTV VMAs triumph (and *Blender* party performance!). This month, she works it with Jay Leno on *The Tonight Show* and at the American Music Awards.

31 JOSS STONE
"FELL IN LOVE WITH A BOY"
THE SOUL SESSIONS

This 16-year-old British soul debutante put her own sultry spin on the White Stripes' breakout hit, powering her first album to a Top 200 debut in September. Last month, she toured with Simply Red and woke up early for *Good Morning America*. This month, she'll stay up late with David Letterman.

Nela Koenig (G-Unit), courtesy of Jive Records (Spears); Nitin Vadukul (Korn); Joshua Prezant/Retna Ltd. (Elliott); Roger Moenks (Stone)

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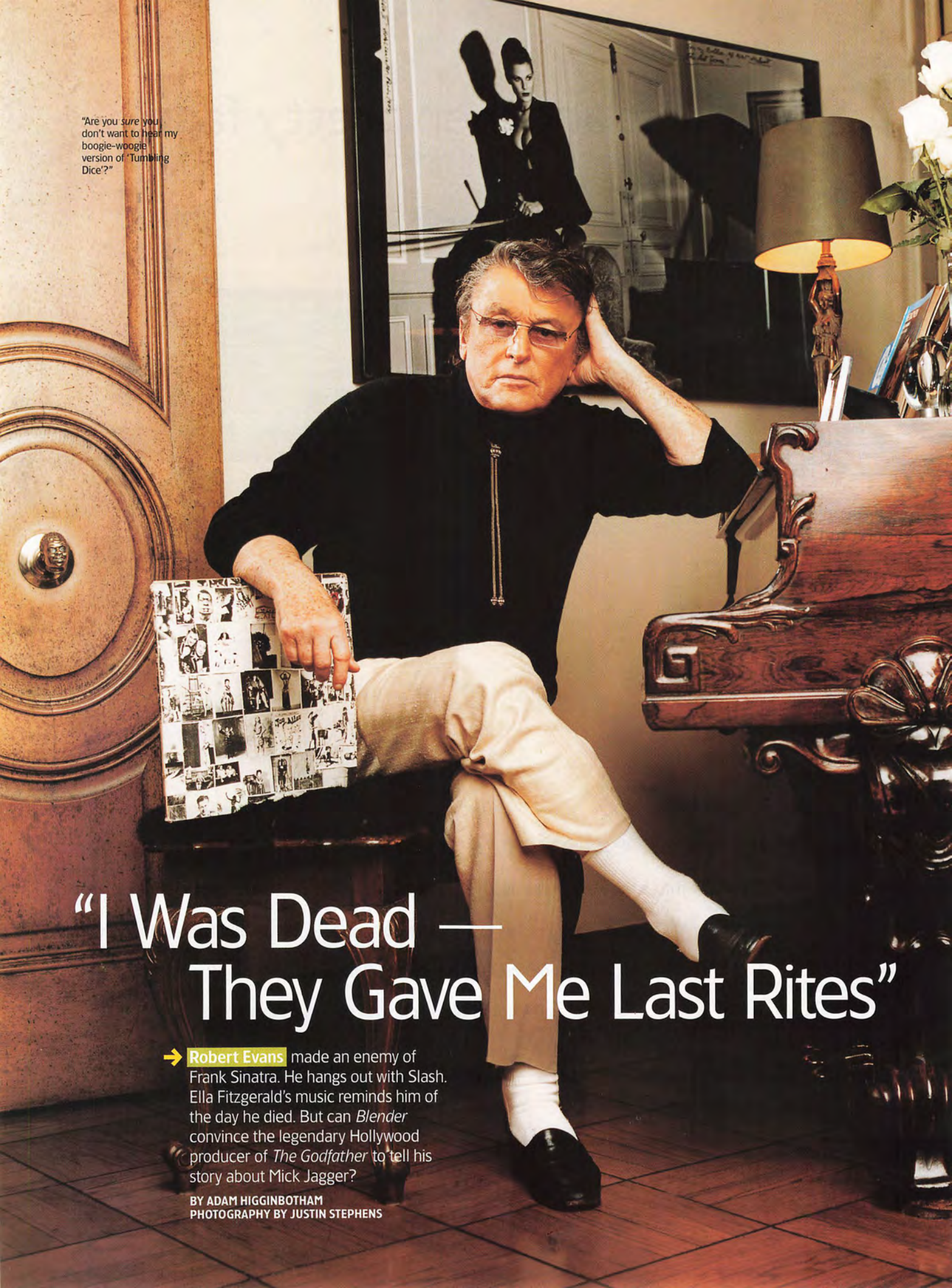


"Are you *sure* you don't want to hear my boogie-woogie version of 'Tumbling Dice'?"

"I Was Dead — They Gave Me Last Rites"

Robert Evans made an enemy of Frank Sinatra. He hangs out with Slash. Ella Fitzgerald's music reminds him of the day he died. But can *Blender* convince the legendary Hollywood producer of *The Godfather* to tell his story about Mick Jagger?

BY ADAM HIGGINBOTHAM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN STEPHENS

"THOSE TWO GIRLS up there," says Robert Evans suddenly, breaking off from a lengthy discourse on the comparative popularity of Guns N' Roses and the Rolling Stones, "they're my two secretaries." He waves imperiously toward a giant black-and-white Helmut Newton photograph in the bedroom of his sumptuous Hollywood home. It shows two women, naked except for their stilettos, making out — apparently in the garden right outside the bedroom window.

"The one on the bottom, the redhead — she was here about 15 minutes ago. The blonde didn't do good dictation. I fired her eventually. You think I'm joking," he growls, "but I'm not."

Although it's only 5 in the afternoon, the legendary 73-year-old movie producer — immortalized in last year's biopic *The Kid Stays in the Picture* and now the star of his own cartoon series, *Kid Notorious* — reclines on his bed in his pajamas. His girlfriend, Tatjana, a blonde maybe half his age, wanders in and out of the room.

Evans unspools anecdotes about his work on the '70s classics *The Godfather* and *Chinatown*; about provoking Frank Sinatra to divorce his new wife, Mia Farrow, by persuading her to keep working on *Rosemary's Baby* when Sinatra wanted her to stop; and how P. Diddy enlisted his help to select an outfit for this year's MTV awards.

Evans listens to a lot of music, but much of his collection was consumed by the fire that destroyed his personal screening room a few months ago. "I had a collection that could fill this room — I could have opened a store, I had so many," he says. "But they ain't there anymore. They're ashes."

CAT POWER

MOON PIX

MATADOR, 1998

"I heard this in the car with Tatjana. I laughed, because *Pussy Power* was the original name of my cartoon. I wanted to call it that, but I had fights with the network, and they wouldn't allow me to. I don't think anything's wrong with *Pussy Power*. I like pussy. Isn't a little cat a pussy? If you have a dirty mind and think of other things, it's not my fault."

ANDREA BOCELLI

CIELI DI TOSCANA

UNIVERSAL, 2001

"I love his voice — I don't look at him as an opera singer at all. It's an aphrodisiac. When he sings, it's terribly romantic. It just puts me in a mood. I bought all his records because they work well. That's all I have to say: They work well. It's great music to play, you know, for two. Draw your own conclusions."

GUNS N' ROSES

APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION

GEFFEN, 1987

"I met Slash in 1996. He hangs here a lot — together we make a strange combo, and no one understands why he's always around. I love him because he's so cool and laid-back. I like his softness, his gentleness — it was totally unexpected, and it's the unexpected that catches you."

MICHAEL JACKSON

OFF THE WALL

EPIC, 1979

"I think he's one of the true geniuses of the twentieth century. I've become very friendly with him. I was up at Neverland, and he was writing something for the children of the world — it gave me chills. I don't believe any of the stories about him. Only that he loves children, which he does. He's a fine, fine guy."

THE ROLLING STONES

EXILE ON MAIN STREET

VIRGIN, 1972

"Mick Jagger — we've been friends for many years. In 1968, he stayed here for a few days. I think his libido is as active today as it was then. I could tell you my story about him . . . but I won't. A wise man once told me, 'The greatest insurance policy for continued breathing is continued silence.' Next!"

JERRY GOLDSMITH

CHINATOWN: ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK

VARESE SARABANDE, 1995

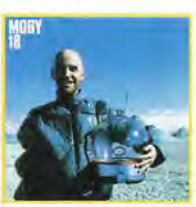
"Music can either make or break a picture. We had scored *Chinatown*, and we took it out to preview. It didn't work. I thought it was the music. I went to Jerry Goldsmith, and he composed it in eight days. Without that haunting score, the picture doesn't work."

NELSON RIDDLE

THE GREAT GATSBY: ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK

PARAMOUNT, 1974

" 'What'll I Do' is Irving Berlin. It's about remorse and love. When Robert Redford looks across from the dock, wanting to be with Daisy, you hear this. I made a wedding video and used this. The song will last forever. The marriage didn't."



MOBY

18

V2, 2002

"Moby I like for one reason: I was in the video for 'We Are All Made of Stars.' I dug his music, and I got a kick — like a kid — out of being in a video. That meant more to me than being the lead in a picture. What did I have to do? Nothing! I just had to sit around, and they photographed me looking at things."

FRANK SINATRA

SINATRA AT THE SANDS

REPRISE, 1966

"It could be *Sinatra at the Sands* or *Sinatra on the John* — anything Sinatra does. I met him when I was shooting my first leading role. We became good friends, and then we became bitter enemies — because of *Rosemary's Baby* and Mia. A lot of threats were made."

LOUIS ARMSTRONG

WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD

MCA, 1968

"I'm writing a new book called *The Fat Lady Sang*. It starts with me dying and being reborn. I was dead, and they gave me last rites. I had a triple stroke. In my head, I heard Ella Fitzgerald singing Louis Armstrong's 'What a Wonderful World.' So the fat lady sang."

AND MORE . . .

2PAC ALL EYEZ ON ME **TORI AMOS** LITTLE EARTHQUAKES **LOUIS ARMSTRONG** THE VERY BEST OF LOUIS ARMSTRONG **THE BEATLES** THE BEATLES **THE BEATLES** LET IT BE **THE BEE GEES** GREATEST HITS **BJÖRK** DEBUT **ANDREA BOCELLI** ROMANZA **DAVID BOWIE** DIAMOND DOGS **DAVID BOWIE** THE RISE AND FALL OF ZIGGY STARDUST AND THE SPIDERS FROM MARS **JAMES BROWN** AT THE APOLLO **JACKSON BROWNE** LATE FOR THE SKY **JOHNNY CASH** LIVE AT SAN QUENTIN **JOHNNY CASH** AMERICAN IV: THE MAN COMES AROUND **ORNETTE COLEMAN** THE SHAPE OF JAZZ TO COME **HARRY CONNICK JR.** 20 **ELVIS COSTELLO** KING OF AMERICA **CROSBY, STILLS, NASH & YOUNG** DÉJÀ VU **MILES DAVIS** BITCHES BREW **MILES DAVIS** KIND OF BLUE **BOB DYLAN** BLOOD ON THE TRACKS **DUKE ELLINGTON** BEYOND CATEGORY **ENIGMA** THE CROSS OF CHANGES **ENYA** A DAY WITHOUT RAIN **ENYA** SHEPHERD MOONS **ENYA** WATERMARK **THE FACES** LONG PLAYER **ELLA FITZGERALD** GOLD COLLECTION **FLEETWOOD MAC** RUMOURS **ARETHA FRANKLIN** I NEVER LOVED A MAN THE WAY I LOVED YOU **GRATEFUL DEAD** EUROPE '72 **AL GREEN** CALL ME **INDIGO GIRLS** SWAMP OPHELIA **INXS** WELCOME TO WHEREVER YOU ARE **MICHAEL JACKSON** BAD **BILLY JOEL** THE STRANGER **ELTON JOHN** MADMAN ACROSS THE WATER **QUINCY JONES** BACK ON THE BLOCK **B.B. KING** LIVE IN COOK COUNTY JAIL **CAROLE KING** TAPESTRY **JOHN LENNON** DOUBLE FANTASY **MAXWELL** MAXWELL'S URBAN HANG SUITE **CURTIS MAYFIELD** SUPERFLY **THE METERS** CISSY STRUT **JONI MITCHELL** TURBULENT INDIGO **THE STEVE MILLER BAND** GREATEST HITS **RANDY NEWMAN** TROUBLE IN PARADISE **MACEO PARKER** SOUTHERN EXPOSURE **GRAM PARSONS** GRIEVOUS ANGEL **TOM PETTY & THE HEARTBREAKERS** GREATEST HITS **THE POLICE** SYNCHRONICITY **ELVIS PRESLEY** 50,000,000 ELVIS FANS CAN'T BE WRONG **PRINCE** PURPLE RAIN **PUCCINI** LA BOHÈME **RADIOHEAD** THE BENDS **RADIOHEAD** OK COMPUTER **LOU REED** NEW YORK **LOU REED** TRANSFORMER **THE REPLACEMENTS** DON'T TELL A SOUL **THE ROLLING STONES** HOT ROCKS **THE ROLLING STONES** STICKY FINGERS **THE ROOTS** PHRENOLOGY **DIANA ROSS** LADY SINGS THE BLUES **SADE** LOVERS ROCK **PAUL SIMON** CONCERT IN THE PARK **SIMON AND GARFUNKEL** GREATEST HITS **PATTI SMITH** GONE AGAIN **BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN** BORN TO RUN **BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN** THE RIVER **STEELY DAN** CAN'T BUY A THRILL **STEELY DAN** PRETZEL LOGIC **CAT STEVENS** TEA FOR THE TILLERMAN **ROD STEWART** IT HAD TO BE YOU . . . THE GREAT AMERICAN SONGBOOK **THE TEMPTATIONS** GREATEST HITS **PETER TOSH** LEGALIZE IT **LUTHER VANDROSS** THE VERY BEST OF LOVE **RICHARD WAGNER** TRISTAN UND ISOLDE **TOM WAITS** SMALL CHANGE **THE WHO** QUADROPHENIA **NEIL YOUNG** HARVEST **WARREN ZEVON** EXCITABLE BOY

Let It Be Better

Paul McCartney adjusts the Beatles' farewell record with a radical resequencing and remix — though *unmix* might be a better term

THE BEATLES
LET IT BE . . . NAKED
✪✪✪✪
APPLE/CAPITOL

THE BEATLES' final album, issued in May 1970 as they were splitting up, is the most notorious piece of unfinished business in their history, a map of their schismatic differences. So does *Let It Be . . . Naked* — a remixed version of the troubled album — amount to a long-overdue act of closure, or open up a whole new can of worms?

Here's the background: *Let It Be* was not really the Beatles' last album at all; it only looked that way. The sessions took place in 1969, after the bored, squabbling foursome hit on the idea of filming themselves in rehearsal, jamming up a bunch of songs to be played on an ocean liner, or perhaps in a Roman amphitheater.

The Beatles hoped the experience would reunite them as a tightly knit gang of rockers. Three years after their psychedelic watershed *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, they ruled out complex studio toil; *Get Back* (as *Let It Be* was originally titled) would be raw, spontaneous and funky.

But band antagonisms prevailed over hopefulness, and the sessions fizzled out. The Beatles walked away and told engineer Glyn Johns to make the tapes presentable. The planned "spectacular," meanwhile, was scaled down to a couple of numbers knocked out on the roof of their Apple headquarters.

Chastened, the four went back to their regular producer, George Martin, and made the highly crafted *Abbey Road*, their real finale as a recording act. In 1970, when it was evident they would not record again and the forthcoming *Let It Be* movie needed a soundtrack album, John Lennon hired Phil Spector — without Paul McCartney's cooperation — to cobble something together from the *Get Back* tapes that Johns had struggled to salvage.

The album was in some ways a sorry affair. Although Spector had been a sonic visionary in the '60s, he had little to offer these Beatles demos except an extra layer of strings. McCartney was furious about the treatment of his songs. He never forgave Spector, and the episode deepened his estrangement from Lennon. The band that gave rock its first big bang ended with an uncharacteristic whimper.

So *Let It Be . . . Naked* is a McCartney-inspired attempt to give us the album the Beatles might have made had they still been on speaking terms. The worry must be that McCartney is taking control of the Beatles' history, just as he recently tried to reverse some Lennon-McCartney songwriting credits.

Though he took no direct part in the process, he appointed engineers at the group's favored Abbey Road studios (led by *Anthology* series veteran Alan Rouse) to effect a complete remix. Many would argue that McCartney ought to leave the Beatles' work alone, but he hasn't overplayed his role. Beatles drummer Ringo Starr; Lennon's widow, Yoko Ono; and George Harrison's widow, Olivia, have all given their approval to the project.

Using the original tapes, selecting some alternate takes to those chosen the first time and exploiting the sonic advances in technology, the Abbey Road team has produced a stripped-down version of the original that improves the sound and changes the running order. Those extraneous string arrangements have been excised, as have the whimsical squibs of Lennon's "Dig It" and "Maggie Mae."

Neither of those short tracks will be much mourned — "Dig It" was off-the-cuff doggerel, and "Maggie Mae" was an old pub sing-along. Worse, they were insensitively placed as bookends to McCartney's haunting, hymnal title track. On the

TRACK LISTING

Get Back
Dig a Pony
For You Blue
The Long and Winding Road
Two of Us
I've Got a Feeling
One After 909
Don't Let Me Down
I Me Mine
Across the Universe
Let It Be

Making *Let It Be*, 1969, from left: George Harrison, Ringo Starr, Yoko Ono, John Lennon, Paul McCartney

Mirrorpix.com (in studio); Hulton Archive (on roof)

The Beatles' final concert, on the roof of their London office, January 30, 1969

album, Lennon introduces "Let It Be" in a squeaky accent ("And now we'd like to do 'Hark the Angels Come' ") and caps it with his ditty about a sailor's tart. But now the song stands alone and becomes the record's newly dignified closer. And McCartney's ballad "The Long and Winding Road," shorn of the orchestral overdubs that so enraged its composer, emerges here with a tender new simplicity.

If this smacks of anti-Lennonist revisionism, *Let It Be . . . Naked* replaces two of Lennon's weakest songs with one of his greatest. "Don't Let Me Down" was previously the B-side of "Get Back," and it never deserved such obscurity. It's a soulful, sensual blues, whose yearning earthiness is wonderfully offset by Billy Preston's quasi-Asian keyboards. If the new album achieves nothing else, it has at least promoted this outstanding and undercelebrated Beatle number to proper album status.

McCartney was furious at how Phil Spector treated his songs.

The remixers' boldest step, perhaps, is also in Lennon's favor. "Across the Universe" receives an audaciously reworked ending, full of a spacious echo that plays brilliantly on the song's cosmic theme. The words sound as if they're resonating from another dimension.

Despite its cheesy title (how Lennon would sneer!), *Let It Be . . . Naked* offers an experience its predecessor never could. It would be hard to make a case for doing this to any other album in the Beatles' catalog. But *Let It Be* was never truly complete to start with. Lennon's decision to hand the album to Spector without McCartney's agreement was a shabby move.

In that light, McCartney has some moral authority for what he has done here. Even Lennon himself spoke in later years of rerecording the Beatle tracks that dissatisfied him. Whatever your reservations, let's celebrate the transformation of a second-rate Beatles album into one more worthy of their legend. *PAUL DU NOYER*

JAMES BROWN

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION ✪✪✪✪

UNIVERSAL

James Brown's greatest hits — also known as the Hardest Working Back Catalog in Show Business

Once shamefully neglected, James Brown's back catalog has enjoyed no shortage of retrospectives in the digital age. The only problem is, now you need a scorecard to keep up with all the compilations. Tighter than *Star Time*, deeper than *JB40*, less specialized than *In the Jungle Groove*, *Motherlode* and *Make It Funky*, *The 50th Anniversary Collection* ably repackages nearly all of the Godfather's watershed singles on two easily digestible discs. It flubs a few no-brainers (no Part Two on the essential "Cold Sweat" yet all of 1988's silly, rap-aimed "Static"?), but it's hard to stay mad at any anthology that traces the evolution of JB's genius from "Please, Please, Please" in 1958 through 1968's "Say It Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud" and beyond. Neophytes beware: Now you've *really* got no excuse.

CHAIRMAN MAO

THE SCORE >>

✪✪✪✪✪ EXCELLENT. A MUST-HAVE

✪✪✪✪ GREAT. CHECK IT OUT

✪✪✪ GOOD IN ITS GENRE

✪✪ JUST OK

✪ WEAK

SHERYL CROW

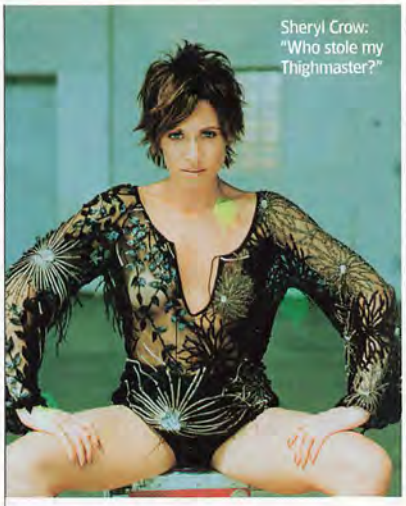
THE VERY BEST OF SHERYL CROW ✪✪✪✪

A&M

A decade of the Missouri mama's hits

Maybe because she's older than most of her early-'90s femme-rock peers, Sheryl Crow's work has also aged better. Instead of the era's standard-issue angst, her 1994 debut, *Tuesday Night Music Club*, offered sparkling pop-rock that was radio-friendly without veering into the middle of the road. If Crow has never threatened to change the face of rock, she has certainly demonstrated an uncanny ability to nail naggingly perfect melodies — "Soak Up the Sun," "Every Day Is a Winding Road" — and a new cover of Cat Stevens's '70s ballad "The First Cut Is the Deepest" shows her respect for ancient musical history (previously demonstrated when she dated Eric Clapton). Meanwhile, her overlooked powers as a lyricist — perhaps best sampled on the sassy "A Change Would Do You Good" — are thrown into rather sharp relief on this set by silly old Kid Rock, who turns up brandishing a fistful of clichés on "Picture."

JAMES SLAUGHTER



Sheryl Crow: "Who stole my Thighmaster?"

ERASURE

HITS! — THE VERY BEST OF ERASURE ✪✪✪

MUTE/WARNER BROS.

Dizzy, dressy disco-pop from British electro survivors

Once mainstays of international pop stardom, now reduced to the role of caring best friend for stressed female TV characters — it hasn't all been progress for gay men. In the late '80s, Andy Bell was the outest of the out, keen on aquamarine sequined cowboy chaps with cut-outs for the butt cheeks, and his bandmate Vince Clarke, formerly of Depeche Mode, supplied the good-time hi-NRG disco. They were easily likeable: camp enough to soundtrack weddings but capable of genuine passion, too. These club hits are heavy on the early stuff ("Sometimes," "Oh L'Amour," "Stop!") and fade after their bleepy cover of ABBA's "Take a Chance on Me," but they offer quality freak-out fuel for those secure in their sexuality.

ANDREW HARRISON

BACK TO CALI

L.A. supergroup made the world safe for alt-country and Taco Bell

THE EAGLES

THE VERY BEST OF ✪✪✪✪

REPRISE

CALIFORNIA: SPIRITUAL oasis or insane asylum? Though Gary Coleman did not become governor, the state remains one strange and crazy youth hostel. Everybody ought to see it at least once in his life, and some, like the Eagles, see it and never leave — they end up as poster children and prisoners of what Californication does to people.

Alternating between wide-eyed longing ("Tequila Sunrise," "Take It to the Limit," "Life in the Fast Lane") and oversated cynicism ("Hotel California," "Heartache Tonight"), this double CD casts back to a time when Don Henley had a 'fro and the Eagles were defining the Southern California sound.

They were assembled by a producer to be Linda Ronstadt's 1971 backup band, and main writers and singers Henley (a touchy-feely Texan) and Glenn Frey (a rowdy Detroit transplant) linked over their taste for country-rock in the mold of the Byrds and the Flying Burrito Brothers. They could make blue-eyed soul as sweet as a barroom margarita, while the musical backups twanged like gentrified hillbillies.

By the time they more or less hung up their boots in 1982 (after some lineup changes and before some so-so reunions), they had sold more than 100 million records, and their rebellion against old-school Nashville had revamped country music itself, influencing a whole generation of country and semi-country stars.

The one new song here, "Hole in the World," features Henley singing hippie lyrics to a melody as thin as Malibu Barbie. So what? It's impossible to even imagine one act or artist being able to symbolize California pop today. The state's population has increased by more than half since 1970, and subsequent groups from Black Flag to N.W.A to Korn annihilated the Eagles' critique of peaceful, easy feelings.

Still, the best Eagles music is brilliantly crafted pop, the harmonies deft and the guitars — especially when Joe Walsh is playing — sharp and snarky. This is a land that time forgot. Welcome to the fifty-first state. *RJ SMITH*

The Eagles were prisoners of Californication.

Eric B. & Rakim: Angry in full

ERIC B. & RAKIM

PAID IN FULL DELUXE EDITION ✪✪✪✪✪

ISLAND

Landmark debut from New York duo that balanced consciousness with cash worship

In one swoop, the 1987 LP *Paid in Full* ended rap's status as novelty music, announced hip-hop's new school and set the stage for its eventual chart dominance. DJ Eric B.'s taste in samples was impeccable — yep, he introduced James Brown loops to hip-hop — and the lithe interplay of beat and bass line on "Eric B. Is President" flaunts his virtuosic gifts for crafting minimal funk. Rapper Rakim's stern tone and jazzy flow were revolutionary: One of hip-hop's first Muslim converts, he rhymes with the authority of Malcolm X and an attention to rhythmic complexity that turned MC'ing on its head. Foreshadowing contemporary hip-hop's money fetish, the title track boasts not only one of pop's most sampled beats, but this bit of personal-empowerment-via-bling-bling: "Now I learned to earn 'cause I'm righteous/I feel great!"

ALEC HANLEY BEMIS

GUIDED BY VOICES

HUMAN AMUSEMENTS AT HOURLY RATES: THE BEST OF GUIDED BY VOICES ✪✪✪

MATADOR

A typically haphazard collection of the Ohio band's offhand pop-rock

Since Guided by Voices albums usually yield gold and dross in equal measure, a best-of seems a worthwhile public service. But this 32-song collection maintains the hit-or-miss method of GBV frontman (and only remaining original member) Robert Pollard. Compiling material released between 1987 and 2003 — including the Dayton group's two-album stint on TVT — the comp ranges from low-res fragments like "14 Cheerleader Coldfront" to such fully realized power-poppers as "Glad Girls." Pollard most often sets his free-associative nonsense verse to operatic Who-style rock, but he also dabbles in pop, folk and funk. About half of the songs really work — a fine ratio for a GBV album, but not so great for a best-of.

MARK JENKINS

WYCLEF JEAN

GREATEST HITS ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA

Hits and misses from the former Fugee with the divided personality

Next to his critically lauded bandmate Lauryn Hill, Wyclef Jean has always had problems being taken seriously. Perhaps it's because he can't decide whether he wants to be Bob Marley or Shaggy, forever flipping from righteous to ridiculous, sometimes in one song. Who else would think to critique hip-hop materialism ("It Doesn't Matter") with the aid of The Rock? *Greatest Hits* is a warts-and-all selection. For every ingenious pop flourish ("Gone Till November," the aching Mary J. Blige duet "911"), there's a moment of wince-inducing crassness. Did Wyclef really just introduce his own guitar solo on "Something About Mary" by saying, "Word up, Jimi Hendrix"? Yes, unfortunately, he did. But that's all part of his erratic charm.

DORIAN LYNSKEY

MÖTLEY CRÜE

MUSIC TO CRASH YOUR CAR TO VOL. 1 ✪✪✪

MÖTLEY/HIP-O

Four-disc set follows hard-rockers from the bowels of the Sunset Strip to the land of rock cliché

From the start, Mötley Crüe were notorious. All those pentagrams and umlauts helped, but their early records became hard-rock classics because they dispensed with the dark side's need for speed, instead combining Cheap Trick's pop crunch with Alice Cooper's penchant for sinister-sounding minor keys. But as a set, these remasters of the quartet's first four albums, along with some demos and the obligatory Tommy Lee drum solo, show how quickly Mötley went

I LOVE THIS CD!

JESSICA BIEL
STAR OF *THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE*

BOB MARLEY
SONGS OF FREEDOM
POLYGRAM

"Bob Marley's songs are calming and soothing, and they're so positive. He made beautiful music. I love him."

Larry The Cable Guy

Lord, I Apologize

14 HILARIOUS SKETCHES RECORDED LIVE

As Heard On His Syndicated Radio Show And The "Blue Collar Comedy Tour" Features Guitarist Mark Tremonti From The Multi-Platinum Group Creed

AS FEATURED IN THE "BLUE COLLAR COMEDY TOUR," CURRENTLY AIRING ON *COMEDY CENTRAL*

RON WHITE
DRUNK IN PUBLIC

A Member Of The "Blue Collar Comedy Tour" And A Headliner At Comedy Clubs Across America, Ron White's Twisted Tales Must Be Heard To Be Believed

CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVISITED
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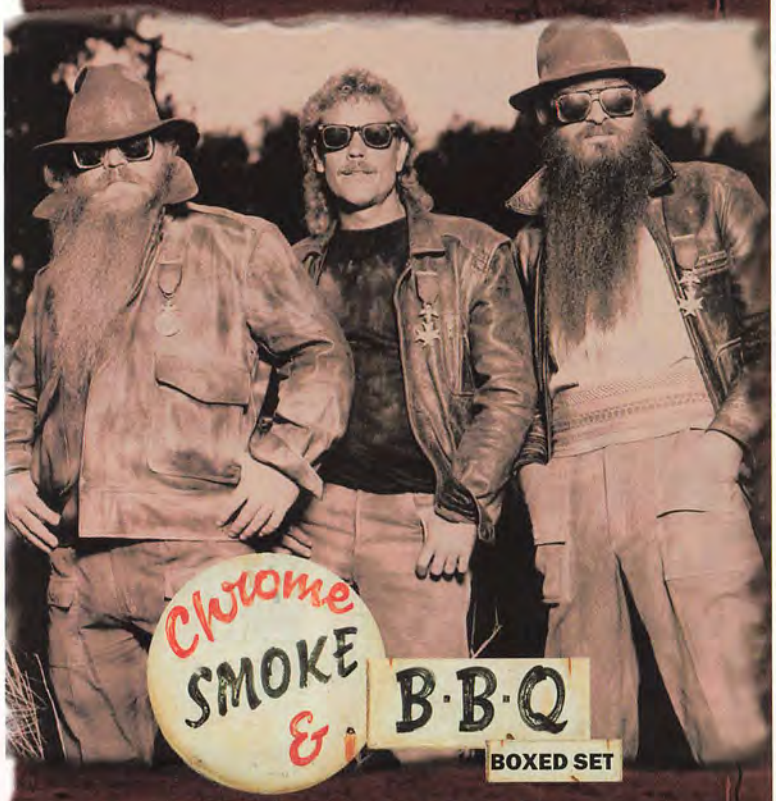

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Pearl Jam: Grunge icons and outlaw muralists

from dreaming of rock stardom to living its clichés. The Crüe's debut, *Too Fast for Love*, is still catchy and taut 22 years later, particularly the mini-anthems "Live Wire" and "Take Me to the Top." Contrast that with disc four's *Girls, Girls, Girls*–era material: blowsy, leaden tracks far less compelling than that period's offstage stories, thrillingly and disgustingly detailed in their best-selling book, *The Dirt*.

MAURA JOHNSTON

BETH ORTON

PASS IN TIME: THE DEFINITIVE COLLECTION ✪✪✪✪

BMG

Double-disc retrospective of superior British singer-songwriter who complicates folk music

An inspiration to both author David Eggers (who wrote *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* while listening to the 1999 album *Central Reservation*) and tall people everywhere, British singer-songwriter Beth Orton can also claim a surprisingly diverse back catalog for a supposed folkie. True, *Pass in Time* is not short of acoustically framed warbling, be it on her signature track, "She Cries Your Name," or on "Concrete Sky," a song that finds Orton's high, clear vocals accompanied on piano by her ex-beau Ryan Adams. But in many ways, the interesting and better stuff arrives with the second CD, when Orton's voice forms a brilliant contrast to the hammering beats of dance gurus William Orbit ("Water From a Vine Leaf") and the Chemical Brothers ("Where Do I Begin"), and the more obviously simpatico soul-folk cultist Terry Callier (a take on Fred Neil's aquatic-minded '60s waltz "Dolphins").

CLARK COLLIS

PEARL JAM

LOST DOGS ✪✪✪✪

EPIC

A trip through the surprisingly experimental back pages of one of the grunge era's few surviving bands

IT'S LEFTOVER JAM

Though it contains Pearl Jam's heartstring-tugging fluke 1999 hit "Last Kiss" and several long-available B-sides, *Lost Dogs* is a rarities set in the true sense: a survey of exploratory flights that wouldn't fit on the Seattle quintet's carefully considered official releases. Tucked between the characteristic bits — the heaving "Sad," the Who-worshipping power chords of "Don't Gimme No Lip" — are moments when PJ take off their Big Rock Band armor and charge out of solemnity into sparkier unknown realms, updating Beach Boy–esque surf-rock ("Gremmie Out of Control") or lifting angry guitar noises into art songs ("U," "Hard to Imagine"). Far more trenchant than the usual odds-and-sods leftovers, these experiments call to mind a Zen paradox: Maybe Pearl Jam are more compelling when they care less about the outcome.

TOM MOON

I LOVE THIS CD!

QUENTIN TARANTINO
DIRECTOR OF *KILL BILL VOL. 1 & 2*

**THE PARTRIDGE FAMILY
THE PARTRIDGE FAMILY ALBUM**
BUDDHA

"When I'm falling in love or brokenhearted, it's the Partridge Family that tells me the most about how I'm feeling."

From top: Chris Cuffaro/Corbis Outline; Graham Jepson/WireImage.com

ROBERT PLANT

'66 TO TIMBUKTU ✪✪✪

ATLANTIC

Hard-rock howler reviews his life without Jimmy Page

We all know Robert Plant the Led Zeppelin mouthpiece. It's the years before and after he dominated FM radio, concert halls and the snowy peaks of Valhalla where it gets dicey. The two-CD *'66 to Timbuktu* provides a 35-song overview of his years in the solo wilderness, with uneven results. The rarities range from pre-Zep workouts with drummer John Bonham on two hippie mementos, "Hey Joe" and "For What It's Worth," to expansive Eastern-tinged interpolations of the blues masters. In between are tracks that didn't deserve to be rescued from the soundtracks to *Porky's Revenge* and *Wayne's World 2*. The solo hits are represented — "Big Log," "Tie Dye the Highway," "Tall Cool One" — though the synth-heavy production is *so* '80s. All told, it's a whole lotta fluff.

GREG KOT

LIONEL RICHIE

THE MILLENNIUM COLLECTION ✪✪✪

MOTOWN/CHRONICLES

Creamy love songs and weightless party tunes from a master craftsman

Hell will freeze over before Lionel Richie makes a sloppy record. After leaving the funk-rooted Commodores, he spent the early '80s reeling off a series of smooth, well-scrubbed pop-soul hits without apparent strain. Spanning 1977 to 2000, this brief 11-track overview omits some smashes (including "Endless Love," an awful duet with Diana Ross) but offers sterling ballads: the morbidly mesmerizing "Hello" and "Deep River Woman," a soothing collaboration with fake-country dudes Alabama. Richie's poised vocals and greeting-card lyrics seem the product of excessive caution,

David Seelig/Starfile

Lionel Richie, the plaidest man alive!

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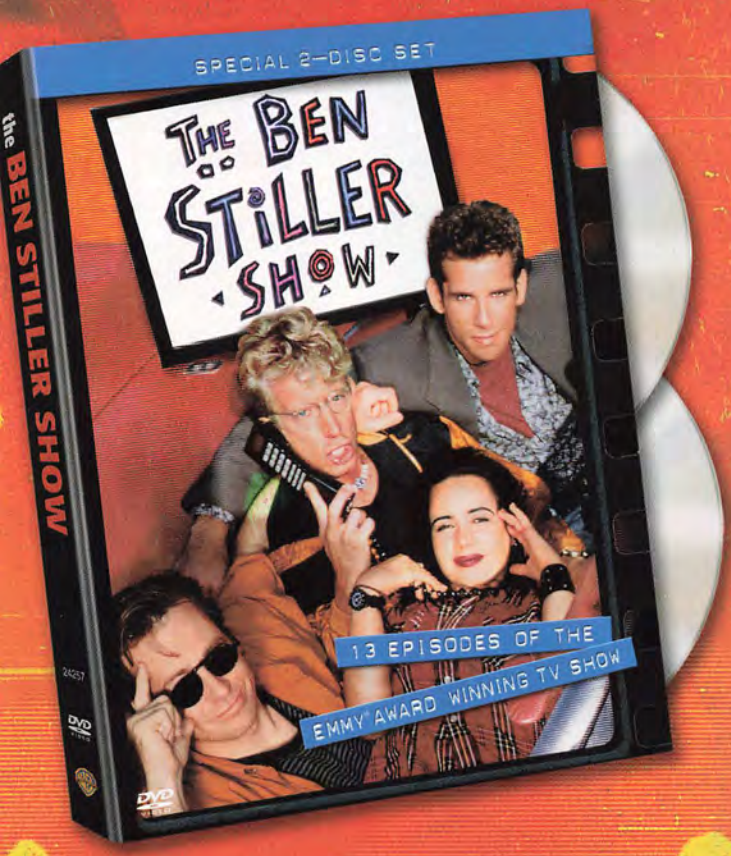

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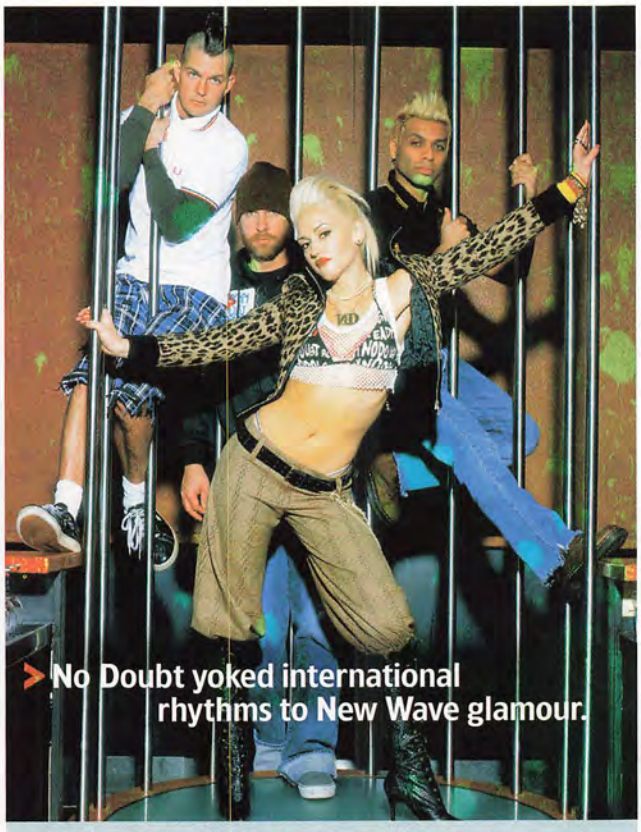

No Doubt yoked international rhythms to New Wave glamour.

UNCAGED HEAT

Flexible, ska-crazed Cinderellas conquer the malls of America

NO DOUBT

THE SINGLES 1992–2003

★★★★

INTERSCOPE

IN THE EARLY '90s, when the World Was Grunge, five Anaheim, California, fans of Madness and other second-generation ska — invariably described as "wacky" because they understood and loved the shiny innovations of English New Wave — believed they could fly.

Although temporarily grounded by their flop major-label debut, No Doubt rebounded in 1995 with *Tragic Kingdom*, emerging powerful and beloved, a band actually within shouting distance of such marketplace royals as Sting and Shania Twain (with whom they shared the Super Bowl halftime stage last year).

Now they're at the ball, all right: Fifteen years after they started playing together, they've released not only this smashing hits collection, but also the heavy hitter *Boom Box*, which appends to these singles a CD of B-sides and rarities, plus two DVDs: one a collection of videos and the other a reissue of 1997's previously VHS-only concert *Live in the Tragic Kingdom*.

No Doubt eclipse their own blond fairy tale, though. The early singles — with Gwen Stefani persona-setting on "Just a Girl" or, arms akimbo, style-setting on "Spiderwebs" — are rougher than such later masterpieces as "Hey Baby" and "Underneath It All," both lushly produced by Jamaican rhythm lords Sly & Robbie. Yet the band's basic notions of rhythm internationalism yoked to California garages and New Wave glamour remain magnetically in play.

The boldness of Stefani's big ballads — the career-launching "Don't Speak," with its Latin tinge; "Running," which dramatizes how *exhausting* romantic liaisons can be; "Simple Kind of Life," equating normalcy with nirvana — link with the instrumental fun (those enormous bass synths) of built-to-last speedies "Ex-Girlfriend" and "Hella Good."

A new track, an inspired version of 1984's "It's My Life," isn't just a cover of a magnificent song originally by Talk Talk, who were New Wave's Coldplay, if not Radiohead. The track is everything — beats, sonic energy, color, Stefani's confidence and wonder, beauty, gawkiness — that makes No Doubt a great band. *JAMES HUNTER*

Frank Lothar Lange/Contourphotos.com

Stone Temple Pilots: "We said *hooker*, not *hookah!*"

not a canny crossover strategy; his timid streak is glaring when he echoes bolder artists, channeling Bob Marley on the bubbly "All Night Long" or recalling the Beatles' "A Day in the Life" with "Say You, Say Me." Only the fervent "Jesus Is Love" hints at the messier impulses Richie usually suppressed.

JON YOUNG

THE ROCHES

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF THE ROCHES ✪✪✪✪

WARNER BROS./RHINO

Funny New York folk sisters who sang beautifully and pulled funny faces

QUEENS OF WITTY FOLK-ROCK

The Roches sang as if they were sitting around the campfire: sweet, casual voices entwined as only siblings' voices can. Three slightly goony girls, Maggie, Terre and Suzzy Roche helped spawn a New York alt-folk scene in the '70s after Paul Simon sponsored their career. Even today, the gorgeous, cascading ballad "Hammond Song" and the comic story-song "Face Down at Folk City" capture what it feels like to leave home, guitar in hand, and try to make it on your own in the big city. One thing they don't have around the campfire: drums. It was a small sign of the decline of '80s civilization the day the Roches, aiming for hits, put drums on their records. They recovered from that (this collection goes from their 1979 debut to a 1992 dazzler), but the best songs come at the beginning, before they were pressured into being the next big thing instead of simply glorious goofballs.

RJ SMITH

SIMON & GARFUNKEL

THE ESSENTIAL SIMON & GARFUNKEL ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Everything the S&G loyalist needs; more than the rest of us want

Listening to two discs' worth of hits and semi-hits from '60s troubadours Simon & Garfunkel, currently on a reunion tour, is like being locked in a rambling dollhouse with two fragile, nervous but essentially harmless little mice as your hosts. The 33 tracks here round up the usual enduring ballads ("The Sound of Silence," "Scarborough Fair/Canticle"), each more earnest than the next, tossing in live performances along with the original recordings. Throughout, *Essential* showcases the pair's trademark powdery-soft harmonies, which means sentimental S&G enthusiasts can knock themselves out on parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme. For the rest, though, this set offers a few surprises:

The duo kick out the jams, ever so gingerly, on 1970's "Baby Driver," a shimmy-shake of a number ("I wonder how your engines feel?") that's actually pretty raunchy — for mice, anyway.

STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

STONE TEMPLE PILOTS

THANK YOU ✪✪✪

ATLANTIC

Lovely parting gift from '90s alt-rock arena heroes

Wrapped in flannel, grunge strived to make rock stars obsolete — but that objective didn't stop Scott Weiland. The Stone Temple Pilots' vocalist was an alt-rock dandy who wrapped a feathered boa around his neck, painted on some leather pants and kept the arena flame flickering during the '90s. Though Weiland's heroin addiction ultimately destroyed his music (the one new song here, "All in the Suit You Wear," sounds like a mid-'90s leftover), this 15-track best-of is a no-frills reminder of the San Diego quartet's expansive hitmaking prowess. Emerging in 1992 with contrived, Pearl Jam–aping anthems ("Plush," "Down") and big ballads ("Creep"), the band found its voice mid-decade in glammy power-pop ("Lady Picture Show," "Big Bang Baby"). The wistful "Sour Girl," from 2000, scrapped the cheap-seats posturing for understated, honest emotion, hinting at greater things never to come — STP's last bang would be the sad sound of its singer combusting.

ERIK HIMMELSBACH

DONNA SUMMER

THE JOURNEY ✪✪

UTV/MERCURY

Disco pioneer who sold sex in 12-inch doses returns with two new songs

Though she's known as the "queen of disco," Donna Summer's legacy lies as much in rock-dance crossover smashes like "Hot Stuff" as in her Kylie-blueprint club songs. The first 10 tracks of *The Journey*, the umpteenth repackaging of her hits, make as strong a case for both legacies as 1995's *Endless Summer*, perhaps because they're nearly identical. *Journey* includes the sublime 12-inch version of 1977's radical "I Feel Love," which would still be a fantastic techno record if released tomorrow. After ditching production/cowriting mates Giorgio Moroder and Pete Bellotte, Summer got religion and lost her direction. She and Moroder reunite for two new tracks, the reggae-lite "That's the Way" and the anthemic, Cher-like "Dream-a-Lot's Theme," written for a children's musical. But Summer is never much fun without sex.

JAMES HANNAHAM

BURIED TREASURE

UNEARTHING LOST CLASSICS >>

FLEETWOOD MAC

THEN PLAY ON ✪✪✪✪

REPRISE, 1969

Fleetwood Mac await the arrival of the 1970s.

Six years before Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham joined and transformed them into pop stars, Fleetwood Mac were a British blues-rock group led by guitarist Peter Green, who was having a severe existential crisis about the music world ("Showbiz Blues"), loneliness ("Rattlesnake Shake") and pretty much everything else ("Oh Well"). The Mac's fourth album is pitch-dark, confessional psychedelia that grasps at the shadows of Chicago blues like a lifeline. And when they erupt into violent jamming, you can hear how the later hits leveraged their awesome rhythm section. *DOUGLAS WOLK*

From top: Len Irish/Corbis Outline; Alphonse Telymonde (still-life); Chris Walter/Retna Ltd.

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THE WHO

TOMMY (DELUXE EDITION) ★★★★

MCA

The first rock opera remastered, plus bonus goofing off

It has since been turned into both a movie and a Broadway musical, but the plot of the Who's 1969 meisterwerk still remains frustratingly cloudy: "Pinball-playing mute becomes new Messiah," a *TV Guide* entry might read. When it comes to the original album, however, the sounded-good-on-LSD premise hardly matters: Thanks to dramatic hard-rock songs as good as "Pinball Wizard," "I'm Free," "Go to the Mirror Boy" and "The Acid Queen," the whole thing hangs together surprisingly well, especially if you ignore the "plot." On the extra disc, between outtakes and demos, studio dialogue proves that, for all Pete Townshend's cerebral concepts, the Who were in the habit of goofing around like schoolkids. Among the mirth (drummer Keith Moon's laugh is truly hyenalike), we discover that Townshend was known to the other members of the band as "Bone"; exactly why remains a mystery.

JOHN HARRIS

ZZ TOP

CHROME, SMOKE & BBQ: THE ZZ TOP BOX ★★★★

WARNER BROS.

Sore-throat vocals and hot blues licks plus silly additives equal greatness

Kings of the endless boogie, the self-described "Little Ol' Band From Texas" understands the power of simple hooks, visual and musical. Guitarist Billy Gibbons and bassist Dusty Hill sport flowing beards that suggest sagebrush rabbis (though drummer Frank Beard doesn't, ironically), and they deck their greasy grooves with surreal humor and memorable images of fast cars and cheap sunglasses. The Top's commercial and creative stars aligned in the early '80s with the addition of New Wave electronics on "Sharp Dressed Man" and "Gimme All Your Lovin'." Reaching back to Gibbons's dopey late-'60s psychedelic group Moving Sidewalks, this four-disc, 80-track extravaganza begs for trimming, starting with the Eagles-style ballads. But any band that still worships Howlin' Wolf after scoring a 10-times-platinum album (1983's *Eliminator*) deserves commemoration and respect.

JON YOUNG

Blender Approved

The best reissues of the last three months

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EXPERIENCE HENDRIX/UNIVERSAL

Three months before his 1970 death, History's Greatest Guitarist plunges into a passionate live set.

GRACE JONES

THE MILLENNIUM COLLECTION

ISLAND

The androgynous Studio 54 icon and inventor of S&M disco gets a long-overdue retrospective. "Pull Up to the Bumper" oozes rhythmic raunch.

R.E.M.

THE BEST OF R.E.M.: IN TIME 1988–2003

WARNER BROS.

Folk gorgeousness and hard rock swirl in the second half of this Georgia foursome's modestly grand career.

CAETANO VELOSO

THE BEST OF CAETANO VELOSO

NONESUCH

Putting extra silk in his samba, the smooth Brazilian singer glides through understated ballads and lavish orchestral pieces.

REISSUES IN BRIEF BY JON YOUNG

No special costumes were needed for A Flock of Seagulls' *Star Trek* cameo.

THE ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND

LIVE AT THE ATLANTA INTERNATIONAL POP FESTIVAL ✪✪✪✪

EPIC/LEGACY

The Allmans were long-haired bluesmen with just one album when they played this 1970 festival. Though the epics "Whipping Post" and "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed" set a dangerous precedent for the excesses of future jam bands, teamwork rules, as guitarists Duane Allman and Dickey Betts stroke the songs, not their egos. Only the 28-minute "Mountain Jam" succumbs to tiresome noodling.

NAT KING COLE

THE CLASSIC SINGLES ✪✪✪✪✪

CAPITOL

A great jazz pianist and even better pop singer, Cole caressed a song with warm, velvety tones that made Frank Sinatra seem frantic. This dazzling package — 101 tracks on four discs — ranges from bebop jive ("Straighten Up and Fly Right") to his easy-listening crooning of the '50s and '60s, when he triumphed over corny tunes ("Ramblin' Rose") and made good ones ("Mona Lisa") positively breathtaking.

MELISSA ETHERIDGE

MELISSA ETHERIDGE — DELUXE EDITION ✪✪✪

ISLAND

The raspy, then-closeted rocker aped Bruce Springsteen's big sound on this 1988 debut, but her generic, gender-vague lyrics do a lousy job of depicting passion, gay or straight. A rousing bonus disc of the songs played live that year better captures her crowd-pleasing charisma, blowing away the uptight studio versions.

A FLOCK OF SEAGULLS

PLATINUM AND GOLD COLLECTION ✪✪

JIVE/BMG HERITAGE

Hailing from the Beatles' hometown of Liverpool, England, and inspired by the corny book *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, these electropop airheads parlayed goofy hairdos and sugary melodies into early-'80s MTV fame. Though the alien-abduction saga "I Ran (So Far Away)" retains a skittish charm, whiny synth epics such as "Space Age Love Song" make Duran Duran sound like Metallica.

SLIM HARPO

THE EXCELLO SINGLES ANTHOLOGY ✪✪✪✪✪

HIP-O

Louisiana swamp-blues great James Moore, a.k.a. Slim Harpo, rarely enjoyed more than regional success with the mostly-'60s singles on this two-disc set (though the sleazy "Baby Scratch My Back" became an unlikely national hit). Still, his peers noticed, and how: The Stones, the Kinks, the Yardbirds and Muddy Waters all covered Harpo's songs, even if none could duplicate his wonderfully sleepy vibe.

ROD STEWART

ENCORE: THE VERY BEST OF — VOL. 2 ✪

WARNER BROS.

Maybe the body snatchers got him. In his shining youth, the raspy Scot was a moving balladeer and sweet rock & roller. That was before these dreary '80s and '90s tracks. Careless performances, formulaic originals and inferior covers of classics (Elton John's "Your Song") suggest contempt for his fans — and worse, for his own once-imposing talent.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

ULTIMATE DIRTY DANCING ✪✪✪

BMG

The smash '87 flick spawned hits majestic (Bill Medley and Jennifer Warnes's "[I've Had] The Time of My Life") and moronic (actor Patrick Swayze's "She's Like the Wind." Scouring the film for every note not on the original soundtrack, this bloated 26-track edition adds background music and more oldies (Otis Redding, et al.), thus diluting, instead of amplifying, the nostalgia trip.

Nat King Cole places Nat Kingdom under martial law.

From top: Fin Costello/Redferns/Retna Ltd.; Terry Cryer/Corbis

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BMAG

EVERY ORIGINAL CD REVIEWED

MADONNA

For 20 years, Rochester, Michigan, native Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone has squeezed great pop music out of a meager voice, titanic ambition and an ear for emerging dance trends. Both her ups (marriage to Sean Penn, the birth of daughter Lourdes) and downs (divorce from Sean Penn, her mother's death when she was 5) have found their way into her brazenly autobiographical records. She self-consciously brought Hollywood Golden Age values to pop, still trades under the vixen image she minted in 1983 and was recently spotted French-kissing Britney Spears on MTV.
By Tony Power

Madonna prepares for yoga class.

BLENDER APPROVED

THE IMMACULATE COLLECTION *SIRE, 1990*

★★★★★

THE BEST ALBUM EVER!

An ambitious title justified by magnificent content: 15 classics augmented by "Rescue Me" and the preposterously sexy "Justify My Love," which was cowritten by Lenny Kravitz, this invented the modern hits-plus package so beloved of record labels. It sidesteps the cheesier singles "Who's That Girl" (a transatlantic chart-topper) and "True Blue," but completists are rewarded with the still enchanting "Crazy for You," from the *Desperately Seeking Susan* soundtrack. It's a shame about the half-baked heraldry and sickly blue of the cover art; otherwise, this is perfection.
Standout tracks: "Justify My Love," "Live to Tell," "Holiday"

EROTICA *MAVERICK/WARNER BROS., 1992*

★★★★

In the sleeve photos, Madonna is pictured both bound and gagged and sucking a toe. Obsessed to the point of derangement, she delivers a concept album about her favorite subject, sex. Strong stuff, even if its one genuine expletive (a single *fuck*) is bleeped out. Relentless Shep Pettibone/Andre Betts beats enhance Madge's incessant cajoling: "Every girl should experience eating out," she coos, and she's not talking about Taco Bell. That female artists (except Millie Jackson) never come on this strongly makes *Erotica* shocking and, well, arousing.
Standout tracks: "Erotica," "Deeper and Deeper," "Rain"

MUSIC *MAVERICK/WARNER BROS., 2001*

★★★★

Her first "headphones album": bold immersion in Eurocentric dance, dispensing with longtime songwriting pal Pat Leonard. British dance boffin William Orbit weighs in with poppy trance ("Runaway Lover"); Franco-Afghan producer Mirwais Ahmadzai lays on squelchy boutique disco; new hubby Guy Ritchie provides lyrical inspiration ("It's amazing what a boy can do"). It's more playful and less pompous than *Ray of Light*, starring a soulful, Sapphic Jacuzzi tune in "What It Feels Like for a Girl."
Standout tracks: "Music," "Impressive Instant," "What It Feels Like for a Girl"

GREAT

LIKE A PRAYER *SIRE, 1989*

★★★★

"Her divorce album," says producer Pat Leonard, with the post-Sean Penn fallout most evident on the anguished "Till Death Do Us Part" ("You're not in love with me anymore"). From the ethereal-metal guitar and globe-shaking drum boom of the title track's intro onward, *Like a Prayer* is Madonna's most touching, least strident record. "Dear Jessie" does "Strawberry Fields Forever"; "Express Yourself" is a mood-elevating pop thrill; and the lavishly orchestrated, dad-baiting "Oh Father" brings mist to the eye. Madonna's ex-boyfriend Prince turns up on "Love Song," presumably to piss off Penn.
Standout tracks: "Like a Prayer," "Express Yourself," "Cherish"

RAY OF LIGHT *MAVERICK/WARNER BROS., 1998*

★★★★

She has the voice (thanks to the singing lessons she took for *Evita*) and a daughter to sing about ("Little Star"), and once again Madonna is on the cutting edge of dance — this time psychedelic, pseudo-spiritual trance facilitated by William Orbit. The ravishing "Ray of Light" is deep in the K-hole; "Shanti/Ashtangi" is a groovy Sanskrit prayer; and Pat Leonard brings a touch of Old Madonna to the melodramatic "Frozen." Well-balanced and uplifting, if New Agey.
Standout tracks: "Ray of Light," "Frozen," "Drowned World/Substitute for Love"

GHV2 *MAVERICK/WARNER BROS., 2001*

★★★★

A prosaically titled follow-up to *The Immaculate Collection*, this is perfectly representative of Madonna's eccentricities from *Erotica* on, with the non-album single "Beautiful Stranger" probably the best reason to buy it. The Sheryl Crow-ish "Don't Tell Me" boasts Madonna's weirdest lyric: "Tell the bed not to lay/Like the open mouth of a grave/Not to stare up at me/Like a calf down on its knees." The ridiculous liner notes, by someone named Dan Cadan, reckon that the *Erotica* single "Deeper and Deeper" is about a miner confronting his homosexuality. Hmmm.
Standout tracks: "Beautiful Stranger," "Music," "Take a Bow"

From top: LFI; Wayne Maser/Icon Photo

CHECK IT OUT

MADONNA *SIRE, 1983*
✪✪✪

Quacking synths, overperky bass and state-of-the-art mechanical disco, with Madonna strapped to the wing rather than holding the controls. It's a breathless, subtlety-free debut, with overtones of Soft Cell and Tom Tom Club, but "Holiday" has barely aged a day, and no one could have predicted that.
Standout tracks: "Holiday," "Borderline"

LIKE A VIRGIN *SIRE, 1985*
✪✪✪

THE BREAKOUT SMASH

Madonna destroys Rose Royce's soul ballad "Love Don't Live Here Anymore," but the irresistible "Into the Groove" more than makes up for it. Ambition ("Material Girl") and Madonna as victim of love ("Pretender") are the emerging themes, and thanks to *Reservoir Dogs*, we'll always debate whether the title track is about a guy with a big wang.
Standout tracks: "Like a Virgin," "Into the Groove"

TRUE BLUE *SIRE, 1986*
✪✪✪

The baroque faux strings and abortion dilemma of "Papa Don't Preach" herald a new, less querulous Madonna, girlishly in love with Sean Penn and bolstered by writer-producer Pat Leonard. The chiming "Live to Tell" is her first ballad not sunk by her ordinary pipes, and no Madonna album has sold more copies internationally.
Standout track: "Papa Don't Preach"

BEDTIME STORIES
MAVERICK/WARNER BROS., 1994
✪✪✪

The courtly breakfast after *Erotica*'s animal shagfest. Nellee Hooper, Dallas Austin and Babyface provide feathery beats and cool samples (Herbie Hancock, Main Source), while "Take a Bow" features her best singing. "Making this was a test of my sanity and stability," she noted. She passed.
Standout tracks: "Bedtime Story," "Take a Bow"

BE CAREFUL

I'M BREATHLESS: MUSIC FROM AND INSPIRED BY THE FILM DICK TRACY *SIRE, 1990*
✪✪

Warren Beatty's movie — actors in rubber masks playing comic-book gangsters — was awful, but he was squiring Madonna, so she got a part (as blowsy moll Breathless Mahoney). Squeaky, *Bugsy Malone*–style Prohibition pop, enlivened only by the fabulous (and entirely incongruous) "Vogue."
Standout track: "Vogue"

SOMETHING TO REMEMBER
MAVERICK/WARNER BROS., 1995
✪✪

A 14-track ballads collection that confirms Madonna's burgeoning vocal confidence, this adds the Massive Attack–soundscaped Marvin Gaye cover "I Want You" (twice) plus the movie theme "I'll Remember." But — oh, shit — here's "Love Don't Live Here Anymore" again.
Standout track: "I Want You"

SELECTIONS FROM EVITA
WARNER BROS., 1996
✪✪

Poor girl becomes a goddess loved by the people and vilified by snobs as a jumped-up slut . . . and then there's Eva Perón. Struck by the parallels between her life and that of the late Argentinian potentate, Madge even took singing lessons to navigate these crass show tunes.
Standout track: "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina"

AMERICAN LIFE
MAVERICK/WARNER BROS., 2003
✪✪

HER RECENT STUMBLE

Living a stable life for once, Madonna overdoes the self-analysis on this slack, narcissistic retread of *Music*. Mirwais runs out of tricks early on, Madonna's shopping-list rap on the title track is risible and "Mother and Father" will have to be the *last* freaking song about her freaking dad. New ideas, please!
Standout track: "Die Another Day"

FOR FANS ONLY

YOU CAN DANCE *SIRE, 1987*
✪

A "dance remix" compilation of dubious use — since when was it difficult to dance to Madonna records? Superfluous piano breaks kick in as Madonna's snappiest tunes are bloated and stretched. The first Madonna album with "Into the Groove," subsequently appended to *Like a Virgin*.
Standout track: "Into the Groove"

WHO'S THAT GIRL *SIRE, 1987*
✪

A bland, uncommitted soundtrack to the dreck-laden comedy flick, but even the chart-topping title theme (one of four Madonna tracks out of nine songs overall) was better than the guest contributions: watery Duncan Faure, useless Club Nouveau and Scritti Politti, already past their brief peak. "El Coco Loco (So So Bad)," performed by Coati Mundi, says it all.
Standout track: "Who's That Girl"

EVITA: ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK
WARNER BROS., 1996
✪

More of what we didn't want, including Antonio "Che" Banderas's gruff non-singing. Only Madonna would have the balls to come back from this, but she had already had lots of practice doing so (after *Dick Tracy*, *Shanghai Surprise*, etc.).
Standout track: "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina"

THE EARLY YEARS: GIVE IT TO ME *TROJAN, 2001*
✪

In 1979, broke after a spell in Paris dancing for the Patrick Hernandez revue, Madonna contributed yelpy post-punk backing vocals to Eurodisco tunes, while Otto von Wernherr, a German actor best known for his role in the campy '80s New Wave sci-fi film *Liquid Sky*, intoned perverted lyrics. Fascinating, awful.
Standout track: None

FURTHER LISTENING

MIRWAIS PRODUCTION
EPIC, 2000
✪✪✪

For all their talents, few of Madonna's collaborators are any good without her. Mirwais Ahmadzai's one album — full of FX that make like your amp has broken — is a fun exception for fans of Madge's *Music* album.

FURTHER READING

SEX
WARNER BOOKS, 1992
✪✪✪✪

Longtime court shutterbug Steven Meisel photographs Madonna in oodles of porno poses — including one with Big Daddy Kane examining her butt. This is perhaps the only coffee-table book containing the line "My pussy is the temple of learning."

FURTHER VIEWING

IMMACULATE COLLECTION
WARNER HOME VIDEO, 1990
✪✪✪✪

All the early promos. It's basic by modern standards, but it's lit up with Madonna's visual presence, whether she's giving it the full "Hello, boys" in "Like a Virgin" or trying her hand at drama in "Papa Don't Preach." Her videos are better than her movies.

Julian Casablancas asks, "Who wants some oatmeal cookies?"

Diving In

On tour, New York's finest celebrate their mopey new songs

THE STROKES

UMBC FIELDHOUSE
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

OCTOBER 12, 2003 ★★★★

WHEN MOST MUSICIANS stage-dive, they actually *dive* — torsos twisting, legs jackknifing, mouths torn wide. When Julian Casablancas does it, it's more like a shrug and collapse: As his bandmates barrel through "Hard to Explain," he stumbles past his stage monitors and steps out onto a security barricade, his face sly but his head bowed, like a troublemaker who has been summoned to the principal's office. He wobbles for a second, then melts into the outstretched arms below. "You seem like nice people," he croaks as he goes under.

With history's most ambivalent stage-dive, the lean, uncombed singer gives himself to his fans and remains distant from them in the same gesture. At root, this push-and-pull is what makes the Strokes tick. On one hand, they're indie-rock's 'N Sync. They're good-looking, fans call them by their first names and they all have *YM*-worthy stats — drummer Fabrizio Moretti has the actress girlfriend; Casablancas has the modeling-mogul dad and Swiss schooling; guitarist Albert Hammond Jr. has that photogenic 'fro.

On the other hand, they do everything they can to resist that image, from dingy jeans and shaggy hair to the air of indifference and disdain they wear like cologne. So far, it's worked — the less they seem to care, the more they thrill people — but how long can they play hard-to-get and get away with it?

With their second album, *Room on Fire,* set for release in a week, the band splits its set between new material and old favorites from 2001's *Is This It.* On record, their best songs are taut grids propelled by dance-beat rhythms, interlocking guitars and Casablancas's low moans and fuzzed-out snarls. Tonight, the songs sound messier, but beefier, too.

"Last Nite" and the first-album outtake "New York City Cops" are freewheeling and muscular, while guitarists Hammond and Nick Valensi drive two of the best new songs. On "Automatic Stop," a reggae-punk riff slides and jabs between tumbling notes. On "The End Has No End," Valensi's guitar does tiny somersaults, deliciously paraphrasing the main riff from Guns N' Roses' "Sweet Child o' Mine." Casablancas rides above it, punctuating lines with a quick, catchy "Oh, no!"

The Strokes, playing live in a radiation unit

BALTIMORE 10/12

UNDER CONTROL
ALONE, TOGETHER
WHAT EVER HAPPENED?
SOMEDAY
REPTILIA
BETWEEN LOVE & HATE
HARD TO EXPLAIN
I CAN'T WIN
MODERN AGE
12:51
NEW YORK CITY COPS
THE END HAS NO END
AUTOMATIC STOP
LAST NITE
THE WAY IT IS
SOMA
YOU TALK WAY TOO MUCH
TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT

If Hammond and bassist Nikolai Fraiture wore their instruments any higher on their chests, their guitars would be bow ties. This is about as expressive as the Strokes get, content to loiter impassive and lanky, focusing on one another and the floor. Aloft on a riser, Moretti flashes winning grins, and Hammond's beach ball–size hair bobs with his fretwork — but Casablancas is the star. Whether he's smashing the mic stand into the floor during "Take It or Leave It" or exhaling a lyric and inhaling from a Marlboro in one fluid motion, he makes the aloof and miniature seem irresistible and *big:* He squeezes swagger out of a slouch.

Wearing a drab mechanic's shirt, he has scrapped his pink-tied thrift-store-dandy look tonight. This is fitting, given the sullen tone of the songs picked from *Room on Fire.*

Casablancas leaves the carousing barstool narratives of *Is This It* for those of a jaded apartment exile: "Friday night's a bit lonely/Change your plans and then phone me/We could go and get 40s/Fuck going to that party," he implores on "12:51," undercutting the single's exuberant handclaps and its New Wave riff with his anxiety. His words luxuriate in misanthropy and isolation. He insists "I never needed anybody" during "Between Love and Hate," and pleads "I want to be forgotten" during "Whatever Happened?"

Moping never sounded livelier, though, and the college kids in the crowd miss no opportunity to squeal and holler. Every time Casablancas turns his back on them, spits some bile in his songs or tosses off a between-song comment, they only get more excited.

They do boo, once. "This is going to be our last song, and we don't play encores," Casablancas announces after an hour. ("When the crowd is *crazy,* ready to break everything if we don't come back, then we'll play an encore," Hammond tells *Blender* the next day.) "It's called 'Take It or Leave It.'" Casablancas is both referring to a song and hammering home the Strokes' guiding ethos: They're glad to be pop stars, as long as it's on their own blasé terms. Tonight, they've earned the right to the ultimatum. *JONAH WEINER*

Danny Clinch (2); Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)

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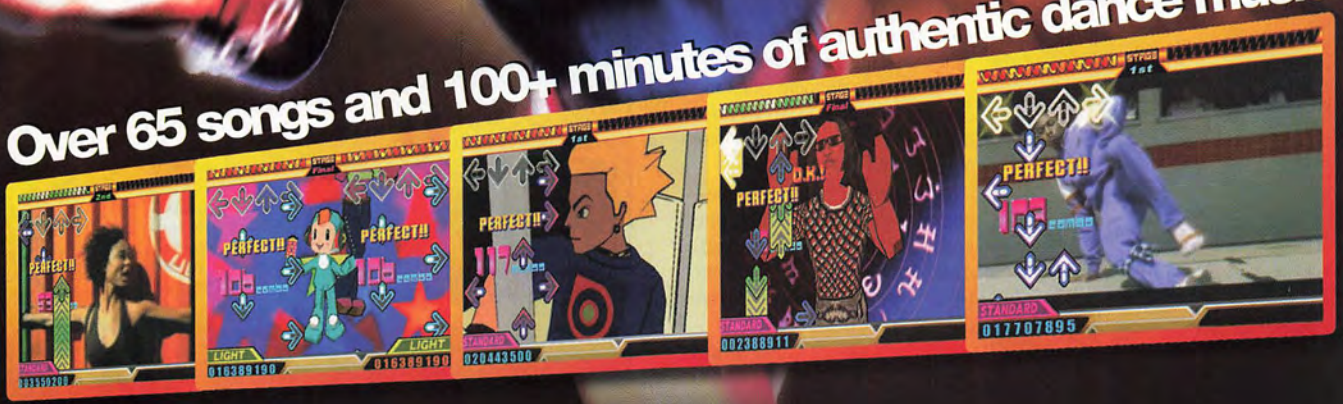

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Lyrics

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PlayStation 2

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THE GOOD!

"Now where do you want these curtains?"

"I've *really* got to get a maid."

GOOD LORD!

200,000 crazed orcs, 6,000 horsemen and more mayhem than ever: Peter Jackson saves the best for last. By Ben Mitchell

LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING

DIRECTED BY Peter Jackson

STARRING Elijah Wood, Ian McKellen, Viggo Mortensen, Sean Astin, Liv Tyler, Orlando Bloom, Ian Holm, Christopher Lee, Cate Blanchett

"A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a — oh."

THE THIRD ENTRY in a movie franchise is usually the point at which the wheels come off the whole sorry enterprise. Think *Return of the Jedi*'s nauseating Ewoks, *Alien 3*'s preposterous gun-free plot or the nightmare that was *Godfather III* — and let's not even get started on *Ghoulies 3: Ghoulies Go to College* (a stain on the entire *Ghoulies* name! A stain!).

But *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (or *LOTR:TROTK*, if you prefer) has the decided advantages of a) not featuring "ghoulies" and b) actually concluding an ongoing story: the attempt by Frodo (Elijah Wood) to destroy the ring by throwing it into Mount Doom. It also provides director Peter Jackson with the opportunity to go absolutely nuts in action sequences that should make *The Two Towers'* battle of Helm's Deep look like a drunken parking-lot scuffle.

Not convinced? Consider this: whereas Helm's Deep saw 10,000 fiendish warriors on the rampage, *Return of the King* promises 200,000 crazed orcs facing 6,000 charging horsemen in just one of two battles.

The only guaranteed disappointment of *Return of the King* is the fact that it marks the end of the annual fix of Middle Earth mayhem, particularly given that Jackson has said he will not adapt *The Hobbit* as a prequel. He describes *Return of the King* as "three hours of payoff" in which the hanging plot threads of the ensemble cast are tied up without the tiresome exposition of the preceding movies (although rumor has it that this film's final running time will be more like an ass-punishing four hours).

Or, as Elijah Wood has said, "I think if you're excited about any of these movies, be excited mostly for the third film."

LOST IN TRANSLATION

With his *Rings* trilogy, Peter Jackson has made adapting a big book look easy. Others were not so fortunate

DUNE *(1984)*
When Frank Herbert wrote this brick-thick sci-fi feudalism yarn, you can bet his grand vision didn't encompass Sting, naked but for a big pair of plastic blue underpants. Director David Lynch's did.

When Tantric sex goes wrong

THE BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES *(1990)*
Tom Wolfe's Dickensian New York text, distilled down to the conflict between shabby journalist Peter Fallow and yuppie overlord Sherman McCoy. Watchable for Melanie Griffith's magically inflating and deflating chest — she reportedly got breast implants midway through filming — but nothing else.

THE BIBLE *(1966)*
A typically bullish John Huston tackles the Big One with all the nuance of a nativity play. It's not even as impressive as the title suggests, either — it covers only the first half of the book of Genesis.

"Basket-weaving *sucks!*"

Courtesy of New Line Cinema (The Lord of the Rings, 4); The Kobal Collection (Dune, The Bonfire of the Vanities, The Bible)

THE BAD!

DR. SEUSS' THE CAT IN THE HAT

DIRECTED BY Bo Welch

STARRING Mike Myers, Dakota Fanning, Alec Baldwin, Kelly Preston

THING ONE: Anybody who endured the gnarled latex mugging of Jim Carrey's Christmas-stealing Grinch three years ago will recall that Theodor Geisel's timeless, rhyme-happy creations don't translate well into three dimensions. Thing Two: This is the directorial debut of a former production designer. Bo Welch was responsible for the look of movies ranging from *Beetlejuice* to *The Birdcage*, and thus seems likely to invest more energy in bright colors and curious textures than in such insignificant niceties as story, rhythm . . . and restraining the gnarled latex mugging of Mike Myers.

& THE INDIE!

BAD SANTA

DIRECTED BY Terry Zwigoff

STARRING Billy Bob Thornton, Bernie Mac, Lauren Graham, John Ritter, Tony Cox

THIS HOTLY anticipated follow-up to Terry Zwigoff's wondrous *Ghost World*, based on a story conceived by the Coen Brothers, finds Billy Bob Thornton and Tony Cox committing grand larceny in the guise of a department-store Kris Kringle and his dangerously jolly elf sidekick. John Ritter, in his final film role, plays the hoodwinked mall manager. The plot has a precocious child teaching the hapless crooks the true meaning of Christmas — but the combination of so many sardonic forces behind the movie promises to deliver more laughs than life lessons.

Blender Approved

The best movies of the last three months

SHATTERED GLASS

The cautionary tale of Stephen Glass, the brown-nosing journalistic wunderkind . . . and pathological liar.

TUPAC RESURRECTION

A surprisingly frank and balanced account of the brief, violent life of the rapper, activist and would-be thug.

LAST GOOD MOVIE YOU SAW?

MYA
R&B singer/actress

"*City of God*. It's an amazing film from a Brazilian director. It's a very touching, true story. What really moved me was finding out that no one in the film was an actor."

AND THE REST . . .

DON'T MISS

BIG FISH

DIRECTED BY Tim Burton

STARRING Ewan McGregor, Albert Finney, Billy Crudup, Jessica Lange

THE PITCH A man attempts to piece together the truth about his dying father's past, a task made difficult by the old man's tendency to wildly exaggerate.

THE VERDICT Burton's fable, told in a series of Munchausen-esque flashbacks, promises to help us forget the ludicrous *Planet of the Apes*.

DON'T RUSH

THE COOLER

DIRECTED BY Wayne Kramer

STARRING Willam H. Macy, Alec Baldwin, Maria Bello, Shawn Hatosy

THE PITCH Casino manager Baldwin uses perpetual loser Macy as a jinx to foil gamblers who hit a hot streak, but everything changes when the schlemiel falls in love.

THE VERDICT Last year's *Intacto* addressed similar themes with greater depth, but Macy and Bello make a surprisingly steamy couple.

THE LAST SAMURAI

DIRECTED BY Edward Zwick

STARRING Tom Cruise

THE PITCH Drunken Civil War veteran Cruise, recruited by the Japanese government to lead their troops in defeating samurai rebels, switches teams mid-struggle after he is captured by the sword-swishing soldiers.

THE VERDICT Cruise spent months perfecting his sword technique. Let's hope he spent some time perfecting his acting technique.

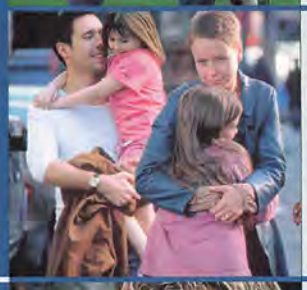
STUCK ON YOU

DIRECTED BY Peter and Bobby Farrelly

STARRING Greg Kinnear, Matt Damon

THE PITCH Kinnear and Damon star as Siamese twins in conjoined roles originally intended for the even more physically dissimilar Woody Allen and Jim Carrey.

THE VERDICT Poo-poo-pee-pee jokes for the kids, Meryl Streep and Jack Nicholson cameos for the grownups: It's a return to top gross-out form for the Farrellys after the PC *Shallow Hal*.



IN AMERICA

DIRECTED BY Jim Sheridan

STARRING Samantha Morton, Paddy Considine, Sarah Bolger, Emma Bolger

THE PITCH An Irishman uproots his family and moves to New York to pursue his dream of becoming an actor. Things do not go well.

THE VERDICT Morton and Considine, two of the U.K.'s finest young actors, make this familiar yarn go down smoothly despite a few treacly subplots.

DON'T BOTHER

TIMELINE

DIRECTED BY Richard Donner

STARRING Paul Walker, Billy Connolly

THE PITCH Based on Michael Crichton's bestseller about a group of archaeologists who wind up trapped in the Middle Ages.

THE VERDICT Donner hasn't made a decent film since *Lethal Weapon 2*. Walker hasn't turned in a watchable performance since . . . ever. And the book was mediocre even by beach-reading standards.

Melinda Sue Gordon (The Cat in the Hat); Tracy Bennett (Bad Santa); Jonathan Wenk (Shattered Glass); Jeffrey Newbury/Corbis Outline (Tupac Resurrection); Jean-Paul Aussenard/Wireimage.com (Mya); Zade Rosenthal (Big Fish); Jim Sheldon (The Cooler); David James (The Last Samurai); Glenn Watson (Stuck on You); Barry Wetcher (In America); Stephen Vaughan (Timeline)

Johnny Depp: "Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum. . . ."

Keith Richards: ". . . or heroin."

AHOY!

Johnny Depp impersonates Keith Richards to help create the best movie pirate ever. By Clark Collis

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: THE CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL

DIRECTED BY Gore Verbinski

STARRING Johnny Depp, Geoffrey Rush, Orlando Bloom, Keira Knightley, Jack Davenport

DISNEY/BUENA VISTA HOME VIDEO

★★★★★

DESPITE HIS matinee-idol good looks, it has long been clear that getting Johnny Depp to play a traditional movie hero would be like getting porn star John Holmes to play someone with a small penis. Who remembers, for example, such by-the-book Depp vehicles as *Nick of Time, The Astronaut's Wife* and *Chocolat*? Actually, *Blender* does — and they all reeked.

Depp's cinematic grotesques and weirdos, though, are always compelling, whether his berserk, enthusiastic Ed Wood, mutely touching Edward Scissorhands or almost completely incomprehensible Hunter S. Thompson.

None of those roles, however, prepared *Blender* for *Pirates of the Caribbean* — in which, for his part as Captain Jack Sparrow, a high-seas thief, Depp chose to channel the spirit of Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards, from his jewelry-strewn hair to his lurching gait. Apparently, when Depp came up with this idea, the movie's producers were less than keen. That's not surprising, given that the Disney World ride that inspired the film is notably short on ex-junkie guitar heroes.

But Depp persevered, and thank God. For without Sparrow's heavily mascaraed, rum-fueled presence, *Pirates* would be an anemic venture. True, Keira Knightley, Orlando Bloom and Geoffrey Rush are all adequate, particularly Rush as a "*Har-har-me-hearties*" rival pirate whose attempts to lift the curse that has reduced him to skeleton form drive the plot.

Sparrow, though, is the heart of the film, whether taunting the sword-obsessed Bloom ("You need to find yourself a girl, mate") or prancing around a desert island with a bottle of booze in each hand ("Welcome to the Caribbean!"). As a result, *Pirates* is not just this year's most satisfying blockbuster but also the only one that warrants a sequel — if only to see whether they can persuade you-know-who to play Depp's father.

"Overcompensating for something, Orlando?"

FINDING NEMO

DISNEY/BUENA VISTA HOME VIDEO

★★★★

Is *Blender* a total bastard for scarfing down a load of sushi immediately after viewing this tale of a clownfish's attempt to find his lost son? Possibly. But think of it as a natural desire to get closer to our piscine pals, provoked by this genuinely touching and fantastically animated movie. This two-disc DVD includes deleted scenes, documentaries and a Pixar short, *Knick Knack*.

THE ITALIAN JOB

PARAMOUNT HOME VIDEO

★★★★

While the recent *Italian Job* remake hardly disgraced the name, there's no beating the 1969 original, which finds heistmeister Michael Caine attempting to relieve the titular nation of some gold in a fleet of Minis. Essentially a two-hour distillation of Swinging '60s grooviness, the film also boasts one of the oddest comic casts ever, ranging from that doyen of sophistication Noël Coward to that doyen of slapping little bald guys on the head Benny Hill.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST

PARAMOUNT HOME VIDEO

★★★★★

Without question one of the greatest Westerns ever, despite having been made by an Italian, Sergio Leone, and shot partly in Spain. Charles Bronson stars as a mysterious stranger whose two interests are a) vengeance and b) harmonica playing. However, the show is stolen by Henry Fonda's flinty-eyed murderer of innocents, largely because Fonda is the last person you would imagine playing a flinty-eyed murderer of innocents. This two-disc collector's edition features three documentaries and commentary with contributions from directors John Carpenter, John Milius and Alex Cox.

SCARFACE

UNIVERSAL HOME VIDEO

★★★★★

The film that effectively invented bling-bling culture, Brian De Palma's gore-soaked gangster epic revels in its absurd excess — be it the violence Al Pacino metes out on his way to the top of the drug-lord heap or his mansion's berserk interior decoration. Although hip-hoppers sadly see it more as a career blueprint than a dire warning, *Scarface* has held up remarkably well, and the "gift set" edition of this twentieth-anniversary release comes complete with a collectible film cell and — wait for it! — a gold Tony Montana-monogrammed money clip. All right!

TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES

WARNER HOME VIDEO

★★★★

Remember when Arnold Schwarzenegger was an actor? Of course you don't. Arnold Schwarzenegger was *never* an actor, as this third installment of the *Terminator* franchise reminds us. But director Jonathan Mostow (*U-571*) goes some way toward filling James Cameron's outsize shoes, particularly with the film's unexpected (and audaciously un-blockbusterish) conclusion. Also includes deleted scenes, documentaries, a photo gallery, a gag reel and commentary from Schwarzenegger, Mostow and Terminatrix Kristanna Loken.

Once Upon a Time in the West: One angry man

Scarface: "Where's my fuckin' rubber duckie, motherfucker?"

Courtesy of Disney Enterprises, Inc. (Pirates of the Caribbean, 2); Reuters New Media Inc./Corbis (Richards); courtesy of Paramount Home Video (Once Upon a Time in the West); courtesy of Universal Home Video (Scarface)

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: "Wait! Come back — I'm just here to trim your hedges!"

THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE

PIONEER HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪

If this original *Chainsaw*'s reputation can't help but make it something of a disappointment on first viewing, Tobe Hooper's rather gore-free film remains a creepy, atmospheric experience. This thirtieth-anniversary edition boasts deleted scenes and bloopers, plus commentary by Hooper and Gunnar "Leatherface" Hansen.

WRONG MEN AND NOTORIOUS WOMEN: FIVE HITCHCOCK THRILLERS

CRITERION

✪✪✪✪

In Alfred Hitchcock's world, men manipulate women, hawkish mothers smother sons and love is impossible — without the appearance of a corpse. Representing his early to middle period, this collection contains that thrilling DNA: *The Lady Vanishes* drops an unwitting girl into an international conspiracy. *The 39 Steps* introduces the crucial "wrong man" conceit, while *Rebecca* foreshadows *Vertigo*'s complex feminism and won the Best Picture Oscar. But the prize in this package is *Notorious*, which blurs the line between romance and espionage. *JONAH WEINER*

WRONG TURN

20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪

A *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake in all but name — and quality. The "wrong turn" of the title presumably refers to the mistaken route taken by those few moviegoers who saw this horribly inept farrago on the big screen. *Buffy*'s Eliza Dushku stars as the least interchangeable of the teens who find themselves on the lunch menu of some mutated, inbred *Deliverance* types. The DVD includes deleted scenes and a featurette about the film's legendary FX guru, Stan Winston. Bizarrely, it's not titled *What the Hell Were You Thinking, Stan Winston?*

X2: X-MEN UNITED

20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪✪

While a huge improvement on the virtually plot-free original, *X2* still confuses the possession of a superpower with the possession of any sort of personality, although Alan Cumming's nervy Nightcrawler is a welcome addition. The DVD includes *Wolverine/Deathstrike Fight Rehearsal* and 11 deleted or expanded scenes.

X2: Hand job? No, thanks.

Blender Approved

The best DVDs of the last three months

THE OFFICE
COMPLETE FIRST SERIES

BBC VIDEO

The BBC's hilarious fake-umentary series should remind those who don't work in offices why they don't and make those who do feel much, much worse.

NEW ORDER
316

RHINO HOME VIDEO

Watch as the Manchester foursome overcomes tragedy and lack of stage presence to become a stadium-filling juggernaut. Includes a 1998 interview.

MUSIC DVDs

THE FLAMING LIPS
YOSHIMI BATTLES THE PINK ROBOTS

WARNER BROS.

✪✪✪✪

Unscreened *Friends* guest spots. Videos featuring a superheroine sushi chef. Liner notes devoted to Michael Jackson and, um, cows. What's that, you say? Wayne Coyne & Co. have gone a bit "normal" on this visually expanded version of the Lips' latest CD? Did we mention the trailer for their forthcoming film, *Christmas on Mars*, in which Coyne's antennae-baring alien is recruited to replace Santa? At least we *think* that's what it's about. . . . *CLARK COLLIS*

SIOUXSIE & THE BANSHEES
THE SEVEN YEAR ITCH LIVE

SANCTUARY

✪✪✪✪

Disbanded since 1996, these goth-punk progenitors regrouped in 2002 for a six-month world tour. This frenzied performance displays flashes of Dorian Gray vitality: "We're only here to have fun," a stripped-to-her-spangly-bra Siouxsie Sioux chirps. *JAMES HUNTER*

DURAN DURAN: GREATEST

CAPITOL

✪✪✪

It's all here: Simon Le Bon trying to drink cocktails underwater in "Rio"; the band trapped in a post-apocalyptic dance studio in "Wild Boys." But viewed from 20 years' distance, this comprehensive retrospective of clips — even with hard-to-find "uncensored" versions — shows them to be as silly as they were horribly expensive.

LIVE & SWINGIN'

REPRISE

✪✪✪

Captured in black-and-white, this 1965 Rat Pack concert features the natty icons playing predictable roles: Dean Martin, the smirking boozehound, casual to the point of contempt; Sammy Davis Jr., an eager bundle of energy; and Frank Sinatra, leading his toadying pals with swaggering grace. *JON YOUNG*

TURN ON, TUNE IN, LOOKOUT!

LOOKOUT!

✪✪✪

These low-budget, high-concept videos make the Berkeley, California, pop-punk label Lookout! seem almost arty. Check out the Donnas' weed-inspired animated clip "Do You Wanna Hit It?" and the dancing indie-rock zombies in Ted Leo/Pharmacists' bracing ode to ska, "Where Have All the Rude Boys Gone?" *NICK CATUCCI*

BO$$ PLAYA

CAPITOL

✪

This unimaginatively fictionalized, overly serious take on MTV's *Doggy Fizzle Televizzle* follows Snoop Dogg as he puffs a blunt while brushing his teeth, visits a fellow pimp ("Should I break the bitch or let it slide?"), buys a massive bag of weed and gets blow jobs. The life sounds great, but this grab for cash just sucks. *NICK CATUCCI*

The Everett Collection (The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The Office)

The really weird thing is, those aren't Andrew W.K.'s hands.

BITING WIT

Andrew W.K. is just one outspoken contributor to the nastiest, funniest fashion/culture magazine ever. By Jonah Weiner

THE VICE GUIDE TO SEX AND DRUGS AND ROCK AND ROLL

By Suroosh Alvi, Gavin McInnes and Shane Smith

✪✪✪✪ *WARNER BOOKS, $17*

"IF I HADN'T been a heroin addict, *VICE* wouldn't exist," says cofounder Suroosh Alvi. Started in 1994, *VICE* magazine is the foulmouthed *Entertainment Weekly* of pill-eating hipsters who deemed trucker caps passé when Justin was still wearing Mickey ears.

In 10 years, it has grown from a workfare project for Alvi and two other out-of-work pals from Montreal into a multimillion-dollar global empire of retail stores, a record label, films and corporate consultancies.

This best-of anthology puts a downtown spin on shock-lit. There are the dead-on fashion DOs and DONTs columns, which viciously caption pedestrian snapshots: "This fuckface weightlifter meathead is standing there like he's Benicio del Toro about to get picked up," one entry reads. "No, dude. You are an ugly little rapist wearing a maroon dress, pajamas and a hat that makes you look like a 13-year-old with cancer."

Elsewhere, Andrew W.K. contributes a rant on partying, calling for "ten punk bands, ten hip-hop DJs and ten auctioneers [to] all do their shit ALL AT ONCE!!!" Slurs like *nigger* and *fag* are tossed around wholesale. It's intended to make you squirm, but a disturbing neoconservatism seeps through, too ("Telling fags how to have anal sex is like telling Puerto Ricans how to have babies"). At their worst, the post-P.C. jabs are hackneyed, glib and poorly reasoned, but at their best, they're lively, sharp and carry more than a whiff of self-satire.

40 WATTS FROM NOWHERE

A JOURNEY INTO PIRATE RADIO

By Sue Carpenter

✪✪✪ *SCRIBNER, $23*

In this how-to manual-cum-memoir, freelance writer Sue Carpenter documents the steep rise of her illegal Los Angeles radio station and its eventual demise at the hands of the FCC. In between, the Jesus & Mary Chain steal her wine glasses, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers crowd into her hallway for an impromptu jam session. Alas, other lively anecdotes are in short supply; still, it's difficult not to empathize with Carpenter's enthusiasm for an endeavor whose roll call of DJs was catholic enough to include both former Reprise Records president Howie Klein and punk icon Mike Watt of the Minutemen, as well as to sympathize with her futile effort to stick it to the Man.

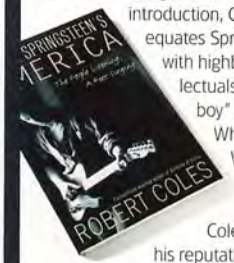
LAUREN HARRIS

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN'S AMERICA

THE PEOPLE LISTENING, A POET SINGING

By Robert Coles

✪✪ *RANDOM HOUSE, $24*



Bruce Springsteen might not seem a likely subject for an academic tome, but Pulitzer Prize–winning sociologist Robert Coles argues otherwise. In his introduction, Coles equates Springsteen with highbrow intellectuals and "Jersey boy" poets Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams. Coles has built his reputation over scores of books in which his subjects speak at length with little or no commentary, and here he collects monologues by teachers, truck drivers, lawyers and other ordinary folk weighing in on the Boss. Though they consider themselves casual fans, each speaker recognizes thematic similarities between Springsteen's songs and his or her own life. But lack of editorial context — we're never told how the subjects were chosen, or even who they are, beyond vague job titles — exacerbates the sense of pointlessness attached to this collection of all-too-humdrum musings.

LAUREN HARRIS

DESIGNED BY PETER SAVILLE

Edited by Emily King

✪✪✪✪✪

PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS, $27.50

In the late '70s, when album sleeves were either Day-Glo punk splatter or dragon-laden prog-rock baloney, the austere, achingly cool covers designed by Factory Records cofounder Peter Saville for Joy Division and their labelmates were revolutionary. Some looked like gravestones, others like the work of old masters, and one — New Order's "Blue Monday," a 12-inch single die-cut to resemble a computer floppy disk — cost more to make than the record earned. Now *that's* art. In this first collection of Saville's hugely influential work — featuring sleeves for New Order, London Suede, OMD and Pulp — you can see a level of passion and engagement in music's visual identity that has since been exterminated by the tyranny of pop videos. It's a mesmerizing coffee-table read, although you'll need a much hipper coffee table to keep it on.

ANDREW HARRISON

THE FALL

By Mick Middles and Mark E. Smith

✪✪✪ *OMNIBUS PRESS, $25*

Twenty-five years ago, the Fall released their first single, "Bingo-Master's Breakout." Now, with only founding singer-songwriter Mark E. Smith remaining of the original lineup, the Fall are still one of the most influential bands to come out of British New Wave; groups as diverse as Blur and Pavement cite them as formative. Mick Middles's book is awesomely detailed, filled with interviews with Smith and others, and gives a real flavor of Britain's most extraordinary one-man band. Smith is a man so cantankerous and wayward that the book's list of former Fall members takes up three pages, but Middles brings out Smith's warmth and humanity as well as his unique vision.

DAVID QUANTICK

Alphonse Telymonde (still-lifes, 8); Rex USA (Andrew W.K.)

THERE'S A GOD ON THE MIC

THE TRUE 50 GREATEST MCs

By Kool Mo Dee

✪✪ *THUNDER'S MOUTH PRESS, $25*

Penned by the early-'80s battler Kool Mo Dee, this chubby book ranks rappers according to a set of criteria at once absurdly extensive and hopelessly vague (categories include "Vocal Presence," "Substance," "Flavor" and "Poetic Value"). Some interesting insights are buried in a tedious heap of jumbled syntax, empty superlatives and mixed metaphors ("He put words together like drummers doing drum rolls in patterns that sounded like a trumpet player doing a horn run"). His taste is questionable, too, and not just because he puts himself at number 5: He crustily top-loads the list with old-school figures while omitting Eminem, DMX, 50 Cent and Ludacris altogether on the dubious grounds of "longevity."

JONAH WEINER

FAITH IN TIME

THE LIFE OF JIMMY SCOTT

By David Ritz

✪✪✪✪ *DA CAPO PRESS, $17*

Tragedy is a familiar theme in the lives of old jazz artists, but even so, Jimmy Scott had it tough. He was born with a hormone deficiency that meant he never went through puberty. Along with what Scott describes as "a short joint," it left him with a remarkable voice, a high, emotional quaver that has earned the awe of everyone from Billie Holiday to Madonna. Since the '30s, Scott has led a hand-to-mouth existence of bad record deals, disastrous marriages, endless touring and odd jobs. Happily, Scott's late-in-life rediscovery, sparked by his performance at a funeral, rescues his tale from bathos. If author David Ritz never quite penetrates the depths of Scott's troubled soul, the gripping weirdness of his story more than compensates.

JAMES SLAUGHTER

PAULA, MICHAEL & BOB

EVERYTHING YOU KNOW IS WRONG

By Gerry Agar

✪✪ *MICHAEL O'MARA BOOKS LIMITED, £18 (IMPORT)*

This nasty little book tells the sad story of British TV personality Paula Yates, whose life was torn apart by drink, drugs and depression. While married to Live Aid creator Bob Geldof, she embarked upon a torrid affair with INXS's Michael Hutchence and regularly confided in the author, who now reprints those private conversations. Reveling in the retelling of Hutchence's death from rumored autoerotic asphyxiation and Yates's from an overdose, Agar exploits every cheap muckraking opportunity in this tawdry tabloid tale. Yates, the poor woman, must be spinning in her grave.

NICK DUERDEN

Breast-feeding always made Paula Yates's pet leopard drowsy.

THE BEST PART OF A BIG BOOK!

Sydney, Australia, 1997: INXS lead singer Michael Hutchence is found dead in his hotel room at age 37

>> JUST BEFORE MIDDAY a maid let herself into room 524 and, finding the door obstructed, pushed it open with all her strength. Michael's naked body was kneeling on the floor facing the door. He had tied a belt round his neck, and attached the buckle to the door handle. The buckle had broken away and he had slumped to the floor. The room was in disarray and there were pills scattered around. Michael was pronounced dead and all hell broke loose. . . .

Most of Michael's family and friends learned of his death from reporters calling for comment. In London it was 4 A.M. . . . Belinda Brewin [banged] on Paula's front door. Eventually, a bleary-eyed Paula opened up; the phone was ringing at the same time. Knowing what the call would bring, Belinda yelled, 'Don't pick it up' and blurted out her tragic news. Paula punched her in the face.

Michael's naked body was kneeling on the floor facing the door.

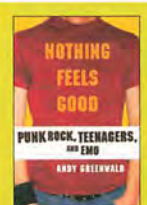
Once the truth had registered, Paula screamed and screamed: "My baby, my baby, Bob [Geldof has] killed him." Her anguish was such that it woke the street. When the anger overtook the grief she called Bob and shouted: "You've murdered Michael as surely as if you'd strangled him yourself." . . .

The news was carried on every front page, every TV channel, the radio and the Internet, and through the grief ran a universal incomprehension. After a moment of stunned reverence, the media buzzed with speculation. At first the cause of death was in question: Were there others present when he died? Was it foul play? Was it a sexual game that had gone horribly wrong?

Excerpted from *Paula, Michael & Bob,* © 2003 by Gerry Agar. Reprinted with permission from Michael O'Mara Books Limited.

Blender Approved

The best books of the last three months



NOTHING FEELS GOOD: PUNK ROCK, TEENAGERS, AND EMO

By Andy Greenwald

ST. MARTIN'S GRIFFIN, $15

The Catcher in the Rye with guitars.

VINYL JUNKIES

By Brett Milano

ST. MARTIN'S GRIFFIN, $14

A guided safari through the bizarre alternate universe of obsessive record collectors.

Cameron Bloom/Scope/LFI (Hutchence and Yates)

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BLAST 'EM!

Learn how to kill with antique firearms — and win at poker — on a mission of revenge in the Old West. By Seth Kelly

DEAD MAN'S HAND

ATARI — XBOX

★★★★

LIFE WAS ROUGH in the Old West: no indoor plumbing, no cable TV and, contrary to what you have seen in Western movies, wildly inaccurate weapons. Rather than picking off their rivals from a perch in a hayloft, cowboys had to get up in each other's faces and plug away from a distance of a few feet.

Happily, Dead Man's Hand allows you to experience the life of an old-school outlaw from the comfort of your La-Z-Boy. Your mission is one of old-fashioned vengeance, tracking down the eight members of your old gang who left you to rot in a Mexican prison. To bankroll this operation, you'll need to win some scratch playing poker (the game takes its name from the hand Wild Bill Hickok was holding when he got a fatal .45-caliber lobotomy).

As with the cumbersome joysticks of old-school classics like Pac-Man, Dead Man's decidedly low-tech weaponry supplies much of the challenge. Your single-action Colt will drop a horse with one shot, but reloading takes time, so strategy is key.

And should all the shooting tire you out, you can relax by visiting a whorehouse or riding your horse through a saloon window — just like everyone used to do in the good old days before TV.

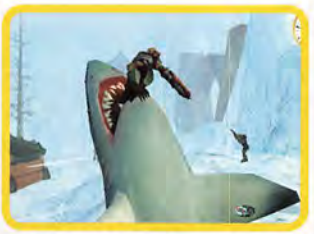
OH, CRAPS!

Three grim stories of gamblers who lost . . . everything

SHOT!
SERGEANT SOLOMON BELL
Bell was a police officer who dropped $20,000 while playing at the high-stakes blackjack table in Detroit's Motor City Casino in 2000. He stepped away from the table and shot himself in the head.

EXHAUSTED!
CAROL AND SKIP WARRINER
Lost $200,000 and their home in 1996 gambling in Illinois riverboat casinos. First Carol and then, a week later, Skip committed suicide by asphyxiating themselves with the exhaust fumes of their car.

HANGED!
MARIO OPALKA
Having run up roughly $90,000 in debt with a combination of Internet gambling sites and 19 credit cards, Opalka hanged himself in his home in Blackburn, Scotland, in 2002.



ARMED AND DANGEROUS

LUCASARTS — PC, XBOX

Machine guns and samurai swords are OK, but it takes real skill to turn a set of bagpipes into an instrument of destruction. The pipes' keening wail provides a strangely appropriate soundtrack for the Lionhearts, four British heroes on a quest to free the fantasy world of Milola, as they destroy everything in their path. But if the pipes don't flip your kilt, the Topsy Turvy bomb, which turns the game world upside down, certainly will. ★★★★

MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES

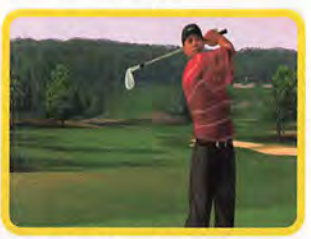
MIDWAY — GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX

Revisit the '80s without having to relive the horror of your Flock of Seagulls hairdo. Midway packs in 23 old-school arcade titles, each perfectly re-created to look and sound like the originals, from the avian action of Joust to the hack-and-slash favorite Gauntlet. Bonus DVD footage contains interviews about the making of the games, but you'll be too busy shooting through Smash TV to give a damn. ★★★★

T3: RISE OF THE MACHINES

ATARI — GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX

Take the reins of everyone's favorite apocalyptic killing machine, the Terminator, voiced by Arnold himself in this failed marketing attempt. The game mimics the latest movie as you briefly clash with human Tech Com resistance fighters in the future before getting reprogrammed and sent into the past to protect John Connor — and perhaps inappropriately fondle an entirely new generation of women. ★★



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004

EA SPORTS — GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX

This new golf game doesn't offer any great strides forward, but it turns in a solid offering. Tee up as one of 15 PGA pros on 19 different courses, including St. Andrews and Pebble Beach. Got a problem with John Daly? Then you can build your own duffer — right down to outfitting him in a pair of ferocious plaid pants. So even if you suck at golf, at least you can make your opponent's eyes bleed. ★★★

Blender Approved

The best games of the last three months

SSX 3

EA SPORTS BIG — GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX

Thousand-foot drops and carving 30-minute runs will satisfy any gamer's inner knuckle-dragger.

F-ZERO GX

NINTENDO — GAMECUBE

Careen around bizarre alien landscapes in this frenetic, gravity-taunting hover-car racer.

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Animated Blood
Violence

NINTENDO GAMECUBE
XBOX
PlayStation 2
ARGONAUT

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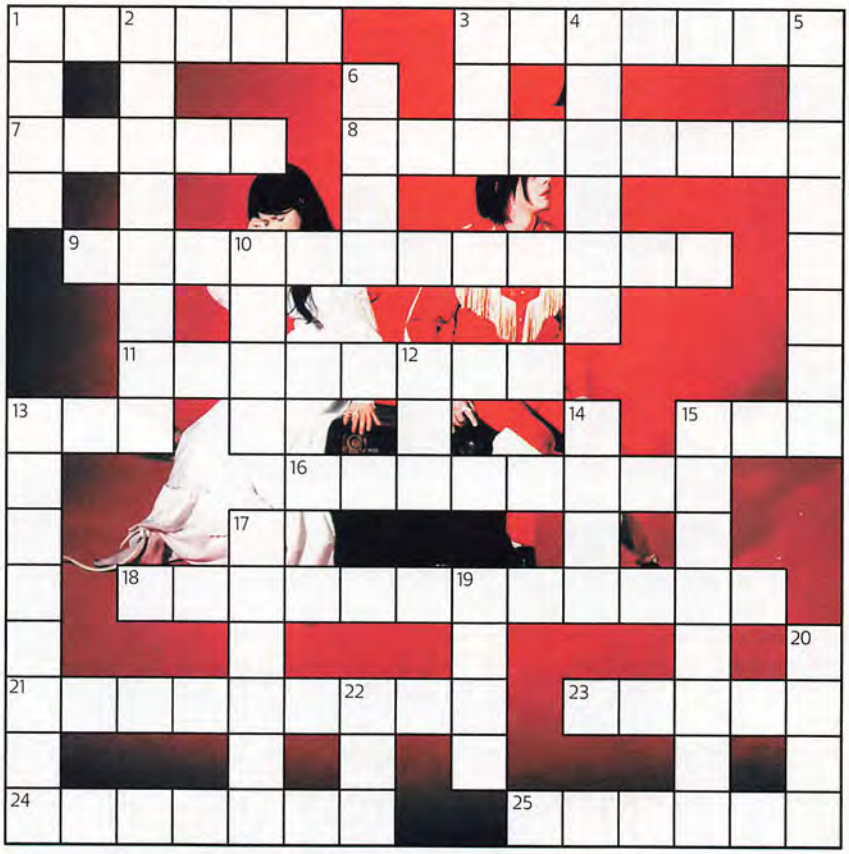
PENCIL ME IN!

Hey, it's *Blender*'s crossword! Starring 5 Down! BY BRENDAN QUIGLEY



ACROSS

1 Stinky, "indestructible" punk band?
3 X's "unknown" lead singer (two words)
7 Maker of iPods
8 He's a creep; he's a weirdo (two words)
9 Roc-A-Fella fella with the album *From Me to U* (two words)
11 Like the Six in a "Gay Bar"?
13 To download music, use Macs or ___
15 The Beatles' Pepper, for short
16 R&B crooner who guested on P. Diddy's "I Need a Girl (Part Two)" . . .
18 . . . and his form-fitting hit (three words)
21 Indie-rockers with 2003 album *Everyone Down Here*
23 "Headstrong" nü-metallers
24 Uh-ooh, she's never going to leave you
25 "Thoia Thoing" singer involved in a sex-tape scandal (two words)

DOWN

1 The B-52's said you can do this if you want to
2 N*E*R*D*'s alter ego
3 Puffy's ex (two words)
4 Filter once sang "___, nice shot!" (two words)
5 The White Stripes' supersize fourth album
6 Redding, who was sitting on the dock of the bay
10 Steely Dan album *Katy* ___
12 Joseph Simmons's *nom de rap*
13 Williams, of 2 Down
14 Irish folk singer Damien
15 Dutty rocker whose song sticks like glue (two words)
17 These sensitive metal dudes are so far away
19 ___ *Peach* (Allman Brothers record; two words)
20 "Let's ___ Together" (Al Green classic)
22 Kiss axman Frehley

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	Average No. Copies each issue during preceding 12 months	Single issue nearest to filing date
A. Total No. Copies Printed	795,498	891,959
B. Paid and/or Requested Circulation		
1. Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541	346,973	425,114
2. Paid In-County Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541	0	0
3. Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales and other Non-USPS Paid Distribution	148,230	150,000
4. Other Classes Mailed through the USPS	0	0
C. Total Paid and/or requested Circulation	495,203	575,114
D. Free Distribution by Mail		
1. Outside-County as Stated on Form 3541	14,982	10,442
2. In-County as Stated on Form 3541	0	0
3. Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS	0	0
E. Free Distribution Outside the Mail	0	0
F. Total Free Distribution	14,982	10,442
G. Total Distribution	510,185	585,556
H. Copies Not Distributed	285,313	306,403
I. Total	795,498	891,959
J. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation	97.06%	98.22%

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (Signed) Stephen Colvin, President

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BLENDER'S PROMOTIONAL SECTION

GUEST LIST

COMPETITIONS, EVENTS AND OTHER FUN STUFF WE THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Brian Kiger and guests hanging with Evanescence backstage at the Nintendo Fusion Tour in Seattle.

FUSION TOUR REVIEW

Brian Kiger and guest at the *Blender* after-party.

» FOR THE FINAL stop on this unbelievable tour of music and video games, the **Nintendo Fusion Tour** brought us to Seattle. **Evanescence**, **Finger Eleven** and **Revis** had the crowd going all night long. The energy was nonstop, including a duet with Finger Eleven and Evanescence's Amy Lee performing "One Thing," and Evanescence covering Smashing Pumpkins' "Zero." With the amazing lights, cool stage, video games and great music, what more could you really ask for?

nintendo FUSION TOUR PRESENTS EVANESCENCE

WIN THIS!

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

★ **IMAGINE SANTA'S BAG** full of some of the goodies in our Gift Guide! *(See page 124.)* That's right, kids, we're having an unreal Christmas contest, and you could be the lucky winner of almost all the products featured — everything from the ultimate shaver to the ultimate CD!

To find out more about this holiday contest, log on to ***blender.com/contests/giftguide*** *and sign up for your chance to be the lucky winner.*

TOWER RECORDS

TIRED OF THE SAME SONGS? Are the holiday jingles wearing you down? Come to Tower Records and find something for everybody's wish list. Need a new favorite band to carry you through the winter? Check out *The Next Big Thing* titles at just $9.99 — they're guaranteed to turn that frown upside down.

He's the deeply peculiar 32-year-old frontman for goth-metal legends Korn who enjoys "sick, nasty" sex, bagpipe versions of "Amazing Grace" and cruising eBay for degenerate art. Can anyone possibly puzzle out . . .

BY ROB TANNENBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN STEPHENS

WHO DOES JONATHAN DAVIS THINK HE IS?

You may have had an advantage with your self-portrait, because you collect art, don't you?
I'm a sucker for any kind of serial-killer art. Shrunken heads, artifacts, anything that's dark. That's my hobby. I started off with eBay, and went from there. I own Ted Bundy's Volkswagen. It hasn't been driven since those murders in the '70s. I also own some early [John Wayne] Gacy paintings.

How's your eBay feedback?
I've got perfect feedback! I'm right on top of my shit.

What was the first thing you did when you woke up this morning?
I threw on some clothes and played with my son. He was all, "Dad, get up." And I'm like [*groans*], "I can't." I kept him out of school today so he could stay with me. I get him only every other weekend and when his mom lets me get him, so that time's precious for me.

Is it hard for you to keep the same hours as an 8-year-old?
When I get him, I put him on my schedule. We enjoy staying up until 3 or 4 in the morning.

Which do you prefer: Dogs or cats?
Dogs. Cats are fucking stuck-up pieces of shit.

When did you most recently feel like killing someone?
Shit. Every day I think about it. It's perfectly normal: "God, I want to kill someone." I would never do it. But it would be nice [*laughs*].

What are you like when you're drunk?
Out of control, a danger to myself. That's why I've been sober for six years. Drinking, coke, speed, chicks: I was living the clichéd rock & roll life. I was like an alcoholic bulimic. I'd drink a bottle of Jack Daniel's, a liter of Jägermeister, puke 'em up and then start all over again.

What made you stop?
I came home drunk one time and my son saw me — then my grandfather passed away. I just made a deal: I stopped smoking, drinking, drugs, caffeine, everything.

If you were a woman, who would you want to be?
I don't want to be a woman. Being a man, I don't have to deal with periods, mood swings, all that bullshit. Women get everything they want because they have a vagina, and men are enslaved to that thing. But overall, women have it fucked.

What do people who don't like you say about you?
I don't know anybody who doesn't like me.

What song brings you to tears?
"Amazing Grace" on the bagpipes. I play it all the time. It's a sad-ass song, man.

How would you characterize your taste in sex?
Deviant. I like sick, dirty, nasty shit. The sicker and more pornographic, the better. I really love sex — not traditional missionary sex, which is boring. Just shit that turns me on: bondage, role-playing, everything.

Who left you star-struck after first meeting them?
Back during *The Phantom Menace*, George Lucas invited us all to his ranch. It took everything for me to go, "Can I have your autograph, sir?" It was fun having drinks with Simon Le Bon, too; I'm a huge Durannie.

So, Jonathan, who do you think you are?
I'm a really nice guy. I just like evil, bad shit. And if you cross me, I'll fucking kill you.

Uh, did we cross you?
No, we're cool, man. [BLENDER]

["Every day I think about killing someone."]

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Spirit // Christian Hits	10

ROCK streams //

The Rock // Classic Rock	15
The Vault // Deeper Classic Rock	16
17 JamON // Jam Bands	17
The Trend // Adult Album Alternative	18
Octane // Modern Rock	20
Alt Nation // Alternative Rock	21
First Wave // Classic Alternative	22
Big Rock // Stadium Rock	23
Organic Rock // Eclectic Rock	24
The Bridge // Mellow Rock	25
Left of Center // Underground . Indie	26
Hard Attack // Metal	27
Sirius Blues // Blues	28

COUNTRY streams //

New Country // Today's Country Hits	31
Country Road // Country Mix	32
Road House // Classic Country	35
The Border // Alternative Country	36
Bluegrass // Bluegrass	37

HIP-HOP streams //

Hip-Hop Nation // Today's Rap	40
Planet Rhyme // Int'l Rap . Spoken Word	41
Wax // Turntablism . Freestyle	42
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Hot Jamz
Octane
Big '80s

First date//

Starlite
Soundscapes
Heart & Soul
The Trend
The Bridge
Jazz Café

R&B streams //

Hot Jamz // Urban Contemporary 50
Heart & Soul // R&B Hits 51
Slow Jamz // Soul Ballads 52
Soul Revue // Classic Soul 53

DANCE streams //

House Party // House Music 60
The Rave // Non-Stop Club Mix 62
Planet Dance // Mainstream Dance 63
The Vortex // Electronica 64
The Beat // Dance Hits 66
The Strobe // Disco 68

JAZZ/STANDARDS streams //

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Jazz Café // Smooth Jazz 71
Pure Jazz // Classic Jazz 72
Swing Street // Swing 73
Fantasy Ballroom // Standards 75
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CLASSICAL streams //

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Classical Voices // Classical Voices 85

VARIETY streams //

Universo Latino // Latin Pop Mix 90
Mexicana // Mexicana 91
Reggae Rhythms // Reggae 92
Folk Town // Folk 94
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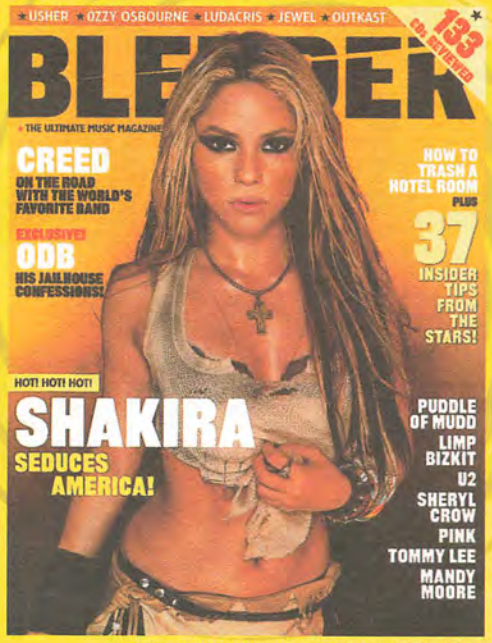

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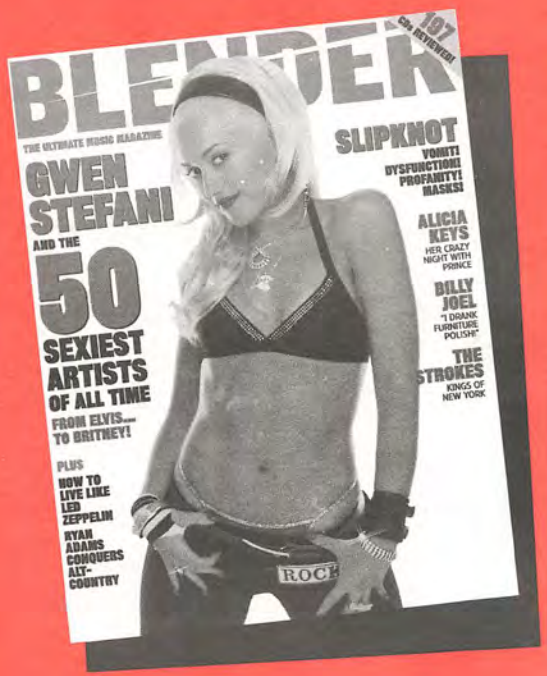

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President

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